



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES

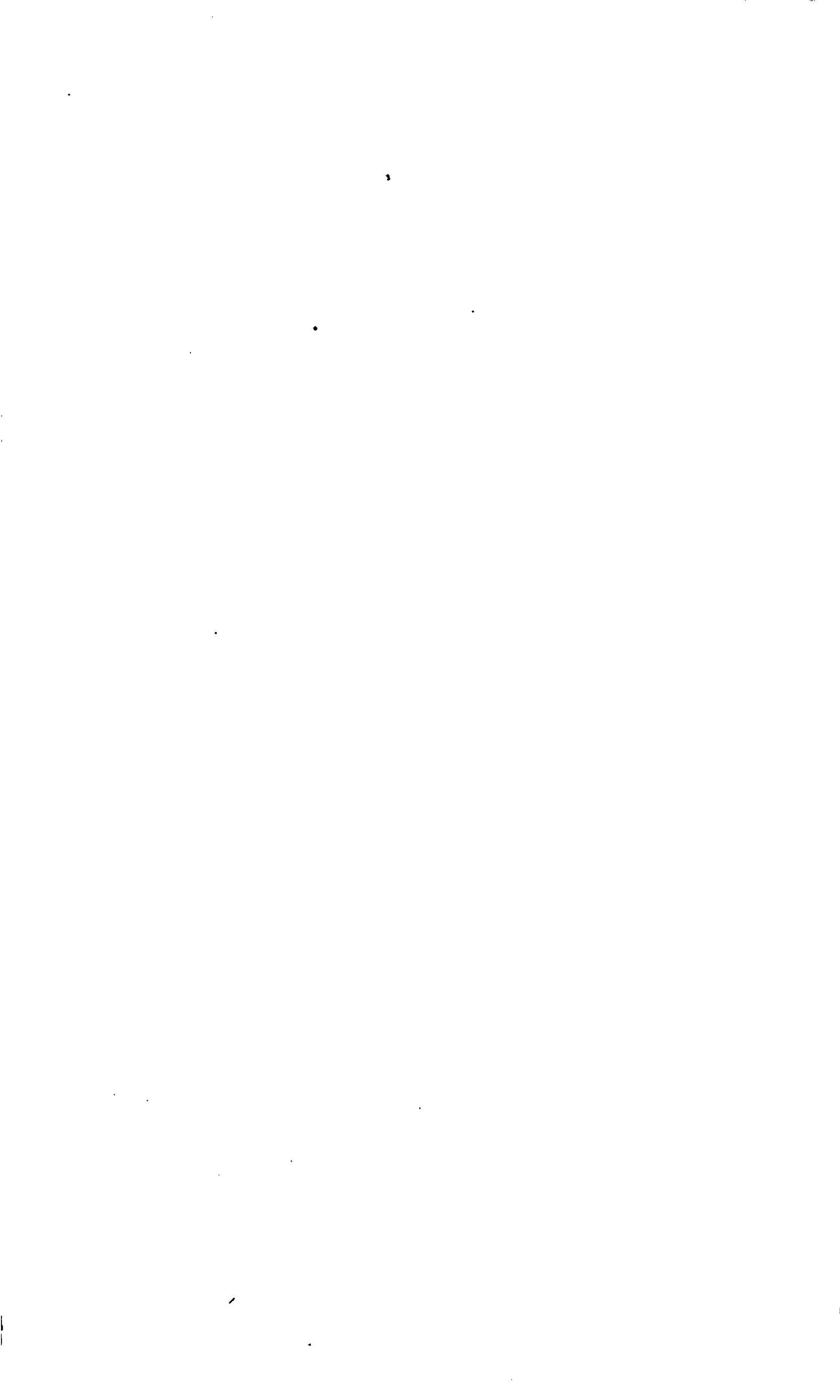


3 3433 06730647 6







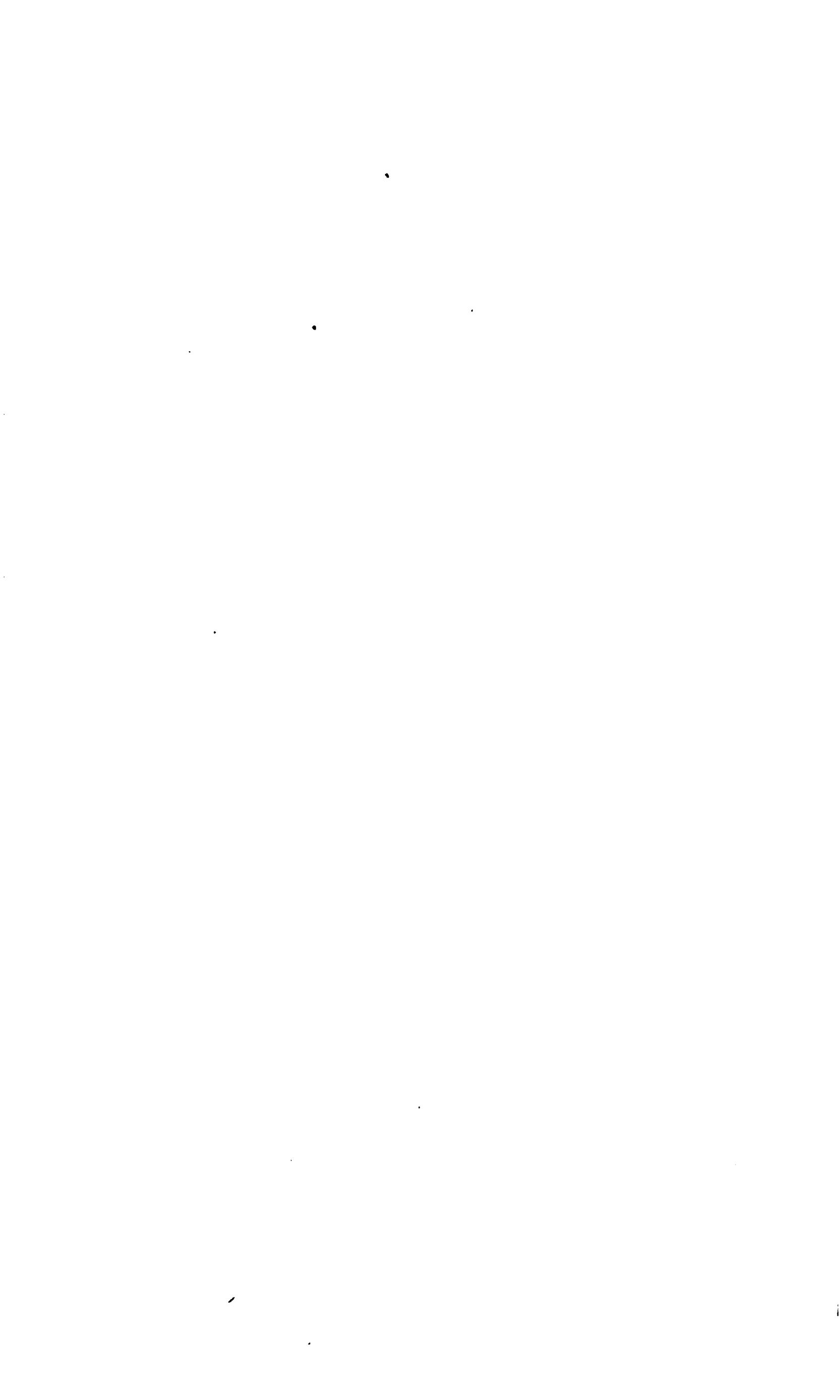


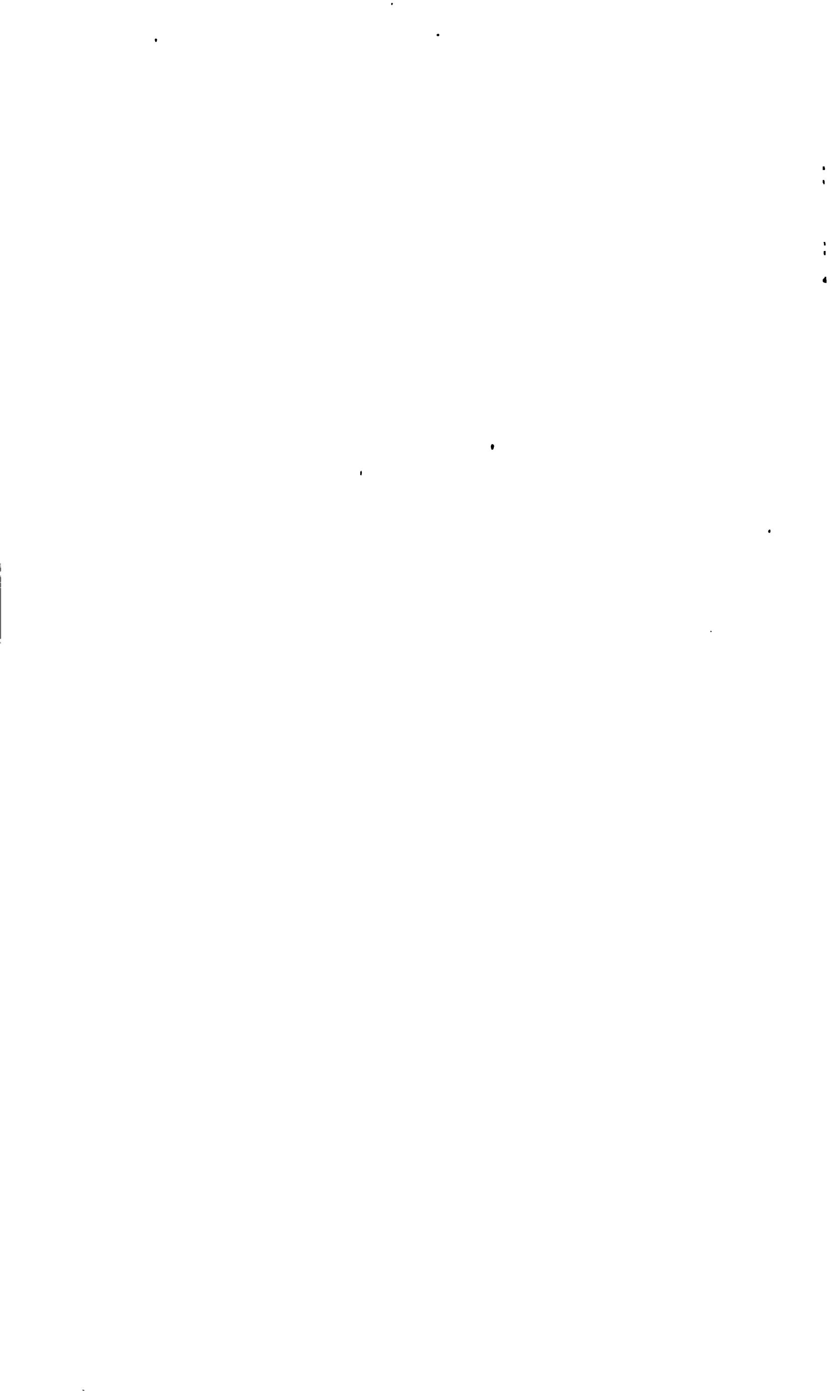


1 avés

NFI

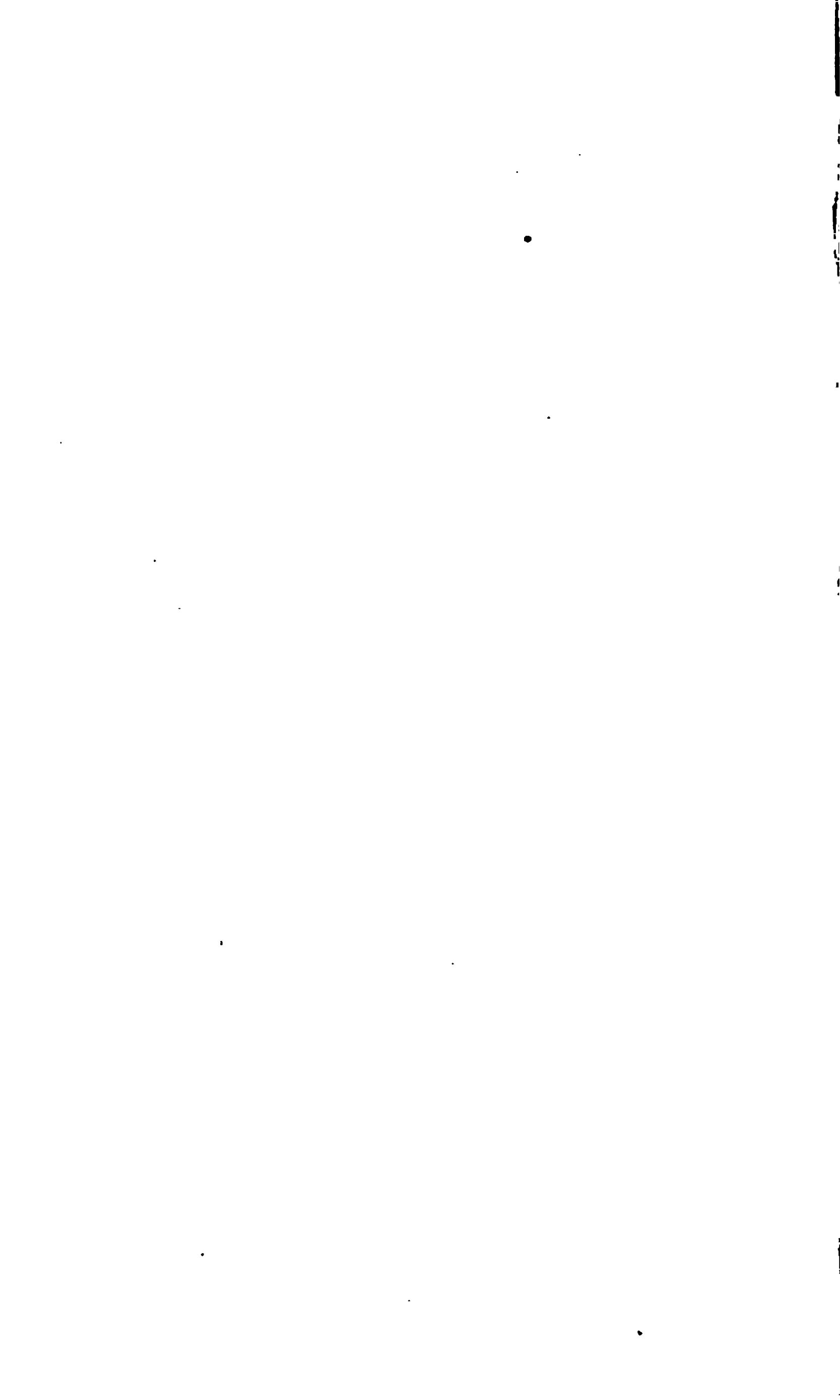






Java

NFI



POETS AND POETRY

OF

GERMANY.



# POETS AND POETRY

OF

## GERMANY.

BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL NOTICES.

BY

MADAME L. DAVÉSIÉS DE PONTÈS,

Translator of "Egmont," "The Niebelungen Treasure,"  
"Körner's Life and Works."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:  
CHAPMAN & HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.  
1858.

[Right of Translation reserved.]

W. H. D. 29

## P R E F A C E.

---

THESE volumes have no pretensions to the title of a complete history of the poets and poetry of Germany; but, whatever their defects or omissions, they are at least the result of a long and intimate acquaintance with the literature of that land and of a conscientious study of the texts themselves. Whenever secondary sources have been consulted they are carefully cited, whether historians or critics. The extracts from the early poems have been translated from the most correct ancient editions the author has been able to procure, and in the exact measure of the original with the exception of Walter of Aquitaine, in which the fourteen syllabled verse adopted by the old German minstrels has been substituted for that of the original Latin poem.

The poetry of a nation is necessarily the reflex of its tone of thought, its manners and its habits, and any notice must be imperfect which does not keep this fact more or less in view.

In seeking, though at so humble a distance, to follow the admirable models presented by many celebrated

## PREFACE.

critics particularly by Mr. Villemain, — in connecting literary investigations by an historical thread, the writer hopes to have thrown a certain interest over a subject often dry and tedious in itself, and yet of great importance in the records of the human mind. If she has entered somewhat freely into the domains of legendary lore, it is because legend and tradition play so important a part in Teutonic annals.

In these volumes the brightest luminaries of German literature are wanting. The materials for the life of Goëthe have been almost exhausted by Mr. Lewis; while, with regard to Schiller, to follow in the traces of Carlyle and Bulwer may seem presumptuous. But of late years so many new sources of information relative to the private history of this great and good man have been laid open to the public as perhaps to justify another biography. Unlike the generality of mankind, the more we know of Schiller the more we love and admire him. Every fresh light thrown on his character brings into relief some new trait of heroic virtue, of generous feeling. Even of Goëthe certain details perhaps may yet remain not devoid of interest. Should these volumes meet with any degree of favour, they will be followed by another which, together with sketches from the lives of Germany's greatest poets, will comprehend those of the modern school, Uhland, Rückert, Freiligrath, Lenau etc.

---

## CONTENTS.

---

### VOLUME FIRST. PART FIRST.

#### CHAPTER I.

	Page
Analogy between northern mythology and that of the East and of Greece. — Fable of Wieland Smith. — The Incan- tations. — Identity of German and Scandinavian mytho- logy. — Priests and women. — German fairy legends of the middle ages. — Elves, Dwarfs, Cobolds, Gnomes and Nixes. — The white women or Goddesses of paganism .	7

#### CHAPTER II.

Translation of the scriptures by Ulphilas. — Rise and Pro- gress of German poetry. — Lays of the Germans and the Franks — The Bardi. — Short historical resumé of the state of Europe and Germany from the 4th to the 9th century. — The German language. — Cycle of heroic poems. — Diet- rich of Berne, or Theodoric the Great. — The Weiss- brunnen Gebet. — The Hildebrand's Lied. — Walter of Aquitaine. — Beowulf . . . . .	37
--	----

#### CHAPTER III.

The Cycle of the Nibelungen. — The horny Siegfried . .	69
--	----

#### CHAPTER IV.

The Nibelungen — The Attila of romance and of history .	81
---	----

#### CHAPTER V.

The Gudrune . . . . .	112
-----------------------	-----

## CONTENTS.

### CHAPTER VI.

	Page
The cycle of Dietrich or Theodoric the great. — The Ecken Ausfahrt. — The Battle of Ravenna. — The Rosengarten. — Dwarf Laurin . . . . .	130

### CHAPTER VII.

Charlemagne and his era. — Religious poetry from the 9th to the 12th century. — The Ludwigslied. — The drama. — Hroswitha. — Her life and works . . . . .	145
---	-----

### CHAPTER VIII.

Brief historical resumé — The Othos. — The emperors Henry 4th, Henry 5th. — The Anno Lied. — The Mero- garten. — The Lombard cycle viz: Duke Ernest, Count Rudolph, King Ruother, King Ortnit, St. Oswald, Orendel, Biterolph, Solomon and Morolf . . . . .	161
---	-----

### CHAPTER IX.

The Crusades. — Their influence in Germany. — Love and marriage in the days of Chivalry. — Peculiar character- istics of German minstrelsy; Manners of the times. — First German Minstrel, the emperor Henry 6th. — Henry of Breslau. — Frederick von Hausen. — The emperor Fre- derick the 2d and Pierre des Vignes. — The <i>Æneid</i> of Veldecke. — Conratin, last of the line of Hohenstaufen. — Jacob von der Warte. — Walter von der Vogelweide	187
---	-----

### CHAPTER X.

Ulrich von Lichtenstein. — Conrad von Würzburg. — The Trojan war. — The minstrel war on the Wartburg. — Nithard and Frauenlob. . . . .	210
--	-----

### CHAPTER XI.

Wolfram von Eschenbach. — Godfrey von Strasburg. — Hartmann von der Aue. — The Titurel. — The Parcival. — The Lohengrin. — William of Orange. — Tristan and Isolde. — The Wigalois. — Iric and Iwein . . .	225
---	-----

## CONTENTS.

### CHAPTER XII.

	Page
The Alexanderlied and the Pseudo Callisthenes . . . . .	255

### CHAPTER XIII.

The cycle of Charlemagne. — The Roland Lied. — Flos and Blankflos. — Malagis . . . . .	266
---	-----

### CHAPTER XIV.

Decline of romantic poetry. — Rudolph of Habsburg. — Rise and progress of the Meister-Gesang. — Rosenblut. — Michael Beeheim. — Fables. — Didactic poetry. — Satires. — Der welsche Gast. — Freidank's Bescheidenheit. — König Tyrol. — Winsdeke. — Bona. — Hugo von Trimberg. — Friar Amis. — The Narrenschiff of Sebastian Brandt. — Gerard Minden . . . . .	283
--	-----

### CHAPTER XV.

Rise and progress of the Drama. — The Devil of the middle ages in tale and legend . . . . .	310
--	-----

### CHAPTER XVI.

Fable. — Reinecke Fuchs. — The French Renard. — The Narrenbeschwörung. — The Curate of Calembourg. — The Schilburghers . . . . .	333
--	-----

### CHAPTER XVII.

The Lutheran period. — Life, adventures and poetry of Ulrich von Hutten. — Franz von Sickingen. — Ulrich von Würtemberg . . . . .	344
---	-----

### CHAPTER XVIII.

Decline of poetry. — Its causes. — The peasant war. — Luther.— His manifesto. — The Anabaptists.— Hans Sachs. — His life, adventures, poems and fables . . . . .	367
--	-----

## 'CONTENTS.

### CHAPTER XIX.

	Page
Further decline of poetry. — Its causes. — Demonology. Witchcraft. — Paracelsus. — Cornelius Agrippa. — The Legend of Dr. Faust. — Conclusion of part the 1st . . .	380

## PART SECOND.

### CHAPTER I.

Calamitous result of the thirty years' war. — Slow and gradual revival of poetry. — The various schools. — Opitz, Paul Fleming, Andreas Gryphius, Paul Gerhard. — The Königs- berg school. — Lohenstein and Hofmannswaldau. — The water poets. — Brockes . . . . .	409
--	-----

### CHAPTER II.

State of Germany at the conclusion of the thirty years' war. — Gottsched and his times. — Literary contest. — Bod- mar and his school. — Hagedorn, Haller, the Schlegels, Gleim. — The seven years' war . . . . .	431
--	-----

### CHAPTER III.

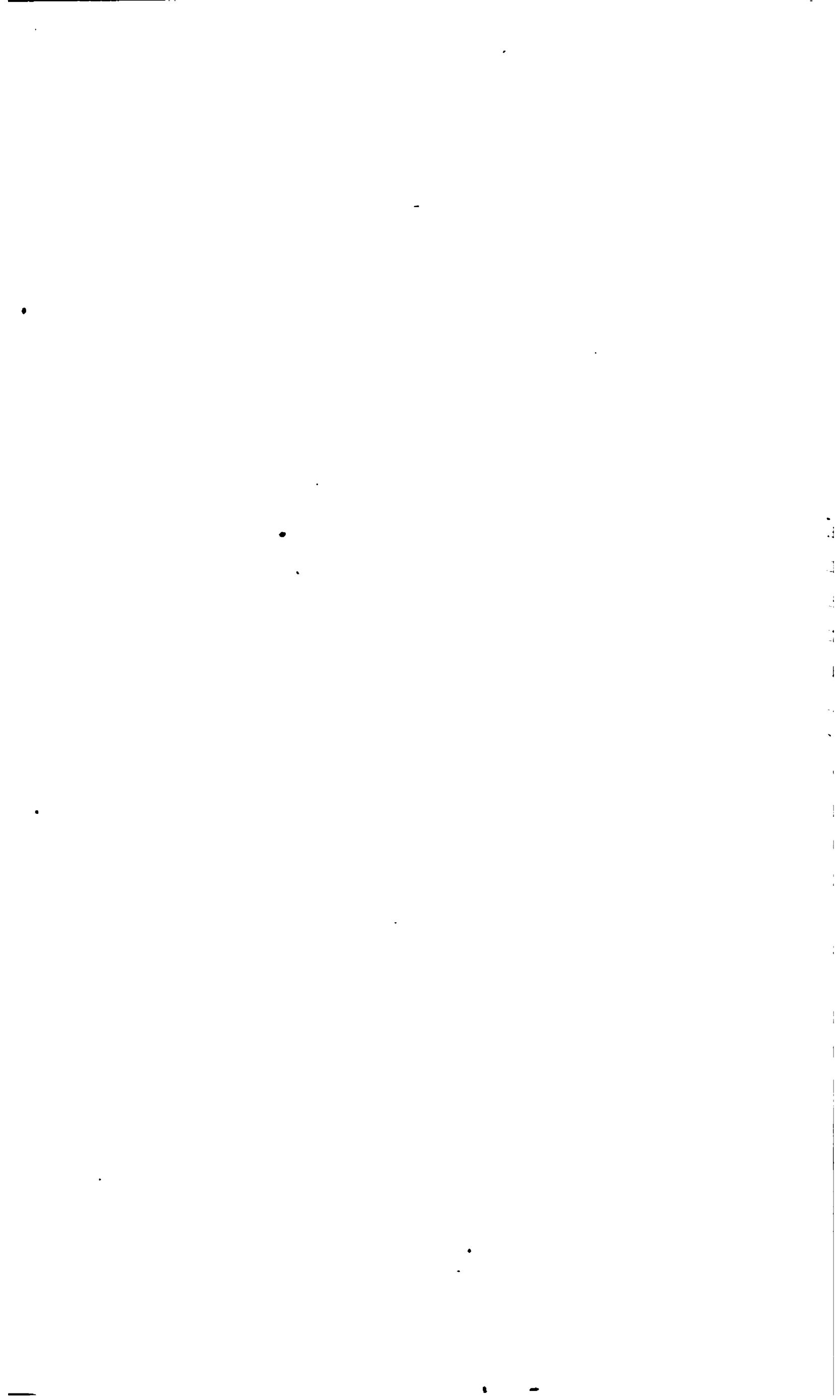
Henry Ewald Kleist. — Gellert. — Gessner. — Uz . . .	451
--	-----

---

## ERRATA.

### Vol. I.

Page 8 line 6 for poligamy, read polygamy.  
" 21 " 6 dele;  
" 22 " 22 for radient, read radiant.  
" 25 " 32 " horse-feet, read horse's feet.  
" 32 " 23 dele;  
" 35 " 6 for cooly, read coolly.  
" 44 " 7 " Pretor, read Praetor.  
" 55 " 26 " her his, read him her.  
" 88 " 2 " grand son, read grand-son.  
" 100 " 10 " appelations, read appellations.  
" 114 " 10 " borne, read born.  
" 115 " 20 " hold, read holds.  
" 143 " 25 " malignant, read malignant.  
" 148 " 32 " saphires, read sapphires.  
" 187 " 14 " less rude, read a less rude.  
" 191 " 15 " discomfited, read discomfited.  
" 228 " 21 " in which, read with which.  
" 247 " 88 " minstrel; skill, read minstrel-skill.  
" 253 " 21 " Briton, read Britain.  
" 274 " 21 " tenour, read tenor.  
" 289 " 21 " almost, read always.  
" 366 " 8 " assasins, read assassins.  
" 471 " 10 " has, read have.



## INTRODUCTION.

---

The days are long past when Germany could complain that the productions of her great poets were either unknown or unnoticed in this country: on the contrary they have become of late years the subject of assiduous study, warm discussion, patient analysis and enthusiastic praise. The reaction indeed has been stronger than is quite desirable; far from denying our Teutonic brethren a place in the intellectual rank of nations, we have now rushed to the opposite extreme, and too often imbue our own literature with something of that vague, indefinite and mystic tone, which is one of the peculiar and, by no means, the most pleasing characteristics of theirs.

It was Madame de Staël who first taught Europe that the nation stigmatised by Cardinal du Perron as hostile to progress and by our own Swift as the “most stupid people on the face of the earth”, boasted poets and thinkers of the very highest order.—Minds destined to exercise the fascination of their genius not only over their own people and their own generation, but over succeeding ages and the world at large.

But Madame de Staël's observations, at once so brilliant and so original besides being tinged with her peculiar feelings and tendencies, comprise a very narrow range. Dazzled by the galaxy that burst unexpectedly upon her view, she fixed her eye too exclusively on that single luminous group, and deigned not to cast a glance on the far spreading horizon behind. Of early German literature she utters not a syllable.

It was reserved for a man of whom our own land is justly proud, the eloquent expounder of Goethe, the gifted biographer of Schiller, to call attention to those rude, but mighty monuments of early Teutonic genius which had hitherto attracted little notice beyond the soil which had given them birth, and even there were long treated with neglect or indifference.

When, in 1750, it was suddenly discovered that Germany possessed a mine of national poetry, rich perhaps beyond that of any land save France; when, like the cities long buried beneath the burning lava of Vesuvius, the Nibelungen and the Gudrune were disinterred from the dusty shelves and obscure monasteries, where they had mouldered for centuries, their very existence forgotten, it was not only Frederic the Great who turned contemptuously away. Most of the literati of the day echoed his opinion, and, indeed, judged by the standard of antiquity, these relics of a bygone age, must have seemed of little worth, destitute as they were of the perfection of form, the harmony of outline, the calm majestic beauty which, with rare exceptions, constitute the

principal and enduring attributes of Grecian poetry as of Grecian Art. A few only, among whom Johann Müller stands pre-eminent, discerned and appreciated beneath the disfiguring mask of a rude and obsolete tongue, the power, the passion, the massive strength, the sombre grandeur, the naiveté, and the pathos which shed so inexpressible a charm over these wild old lays.

For many years Germany remained insensible to the value of her treasures.

But, when bowed down beneath the galling yoke of Napoleon, humbled in her own eyes and in those of Europe, she suddenly bethought her of these neglected relics with their spirit stirring tales of heroes and conquerors of German race, and turned to them, at once to forget the gloomy present and to draw thence, as from a pure and invigorating source, new hope and strength for the future. *Then* indeed the film seemed to fall at once from every eye and, to the burst of proud congratulation, succeeded volume upon volume of discussion as to the origin of these epics which shed a light, like that of stars amid the darkness, upon the manners, habits and feelings of the primitive races of Germany. A whole library of commentaries, explanations etc., has grouped itself around them, and every day produces some addition to the number. (¹)

Despite the admirable essays of Mr. Carlyle, early German poetry is but little known in England.

---

(¹) *Die Geschichte deutscher Literatur* von Billmar, Vol. I. p. 216.

Many of the lays he did not notice — some indeed have been discovered only very lately.

Again, while the names of Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller have become household words among us, little if any attention has been vouchsafed to many who, though infinitely inferior in all the higher attributes of genius, have still merit enough to invest them with a certain degree of interest, even in the eyes of an English reader. It is in the hope that the history of the Poets and Poetry of Germany from the earliest ages down to the middle of the 19th century, blended with notices of its Mythology and traditions, its courts and camps drawn from authentic sources, may possess some attraction, that we venture to present these volumes.

True, the stormy realities of life, the important questions now agitating the public mind and affecting the happiness or misery of humanity, leave but little time and little sympathy for poetry, more especially for that of a period far removed in manners, habits and customs from our own. — Yet, there are some who, in a leisure hour, may feel a certain pleasure in thus tracing, step by step through all its phases, the legends of a wild romantic age — in marking the development of the mind of a great nation and the rise and progress of a literature which acts so powerfully on our own, even as we love to watch the mountain torrent from its very source, through all its devious windings, till we behold it expand into the noble and fertilizing stream.

The early productions of the German muse form a singular contrast to those of later date. While idealism, in its most comprehensive sense, is the

prevailing characteristic of the latter, the former are intensely realist. Not indeed that *they* are devoid of the vague and mysterious — but the mystery lies in the *fate* and *fortunes* of the heroes, not in their *thoughts* or *feelings*. There is no attempt to fathom the depths of the human soul, to lay bare its secret struggles, to depict its unuttered agonies. The poetic traditions, from which all the lays we still possess were evidently moulded, were meant to be sung not read — to inspire delight, to rouse emulation, not to stimulate inquiry or suggest reflection — there are no shadowy outlines, no hues melting into each other till they become almost invisible — yet beautiful in their very indistinctness — the touch is rude and heavy, but bold, graphic and decided! To say that, in addition, the earliest German poems have all the charm of a fairy tale, would be but sorry recommendation. The discoveries of science have so far outstripped the wildest dreams of imagination, that the marvellous has ceased either to move or to astonish us, but they possess merits of a higher order, and while stimulating our curiosity — if we have any remaining — by the strange and supernatural, they touch one of those chords which still vibrate in every heart by traits of human tenderness and human affection.

As they die away, receding into distance, new forms appear, less vast and mighty. — In the 10th century, amid darkness and barbarism, we behold the pensive figure of a youthful nun cheering the silence of the convent shades by productions which even now call forth admiring attention.

A little later and the minstrels of the North, the Gottfrieds, the Wolframs, the Walthers von der Vogelweide start up before us harp in hand, pouring forth their strains of love and chivalry, and shedding a light, like that of a bright morning in early spring, upon the scene around. "No one (says an influential review) can have an idea of the poetic mind of the German nation who knows not these old minstrels. They are the sweet wild flowers of German fancy, fragrant with all the love and truth and faith of olden times. In them the great heart of the German nation beats and, in their natural grace and naiveté, they move the soul far more than the laboured productions of modern times". (1)

---

(1) West. Review, April 1854.

---

## CHAPTER I.

ANALOGY BETWEEN NORTHERN MYTHOLOGY AND THAT OF THE EAST AND OF GREECE. — FABLE OF WIELAND OR VELAND SMITH. — THE INCANTATIONS. — IDENTITY OF GERMAN AND SCANDINAVIAN MYTHOLOGY. — PRIESTS AND WOMEN. — GERMAN FAIRY LEGENDS OF THE MIDDLE AGES. — ELVES, DWARFS, COBOLDS, GNOMES AND NIXES. — THE WHITE WOMEN OR GODDESSES OF PAGANISM.

THERE are few nations whose early history is invested with more elements of romance than that of the Germans, and to us in whose veins runs the blood of the North, be it Scandinavian or Anglo-Saxon, they are naturally an object of double interest. It is from the graphic pen of Tacitus that most of our knowledge of them is derived. We picture them to ourselves as he describes them, the men of lofty stature and noble mien, with open brow and bright blue eyes, dauntless in the battle and tender beside the domestic hearth, the women at once fair and pure, chaste and heroic; and, forgetting that the praises he lavished on these barbarians were in a great degree designed as a satire on the vices and corruptions of his own people, we give them full credit for all the stern

but manly virtues he attributes to them. Certain little draw-backs to the picture, viz; that one half of the nation at least was held in the most abject slavery by the other, that human sacrifices were frequently offered at the shrines of their idols, and that, despite the reverence shown to women, polygamy existed in its fullest extent, are kept pretty much in the back-ground.<sup>(1)</sup> Of the latter fact, indeed, Tacitus does not seem to have been aware. Another very natural error into which the great historian falls, is in describing the Germans as aborigines on the soil where the Romans found them.

Modern science, by pointing out the analogy between the Teutonic and Aryan languages, has lifted, if not totally removed, the dense veil which long hung over their origin, and has established, with tolerable certainty, that they belong to those races who, from the vast plains of Asia, poured their countless myriads over our own continent. Indeed, the history of the Indo-Germanic Tongues forms our surest guide in following the tangled mazes of those migrations which have peopled Europe, and the testimony of science is confirmed by that of poetry. In the "Edda," which evidently embodies the general religious system of all the tribes of the North, a system modified indeed by the diversity of climate, manners and customs, it is expressly stated that the Gods come from "the Land of the Morning." In Scandinavian Mythology we find the strange majestic traditions of the East and the poetic

---

(1) See Grimm's *Helden sagen*. Vol. 1st.

dreams of early Greece fused and moulded into the wild fantastic shapes peculiar to the North.

Attempts have been made to identify Odin with the Hindoo Buddha; but as the attributes of the former are immovable repose and tranquillity, and those of the latter fierce and warlike passion, the analogy is not very obvious. Far more striking is the resemblance between Thor, with his giant strength and redoubtable hammer, and Hercules, between the gentle and loving Balder and Apollo. The combat of the Gods of Greece and the Titans is shadowed forth in that of the Asis and the giants and Loki, the spirit of evil, is probably only another name for the Siva of the Hindoos. It is interesting to trace the course of the fables and symbols which, under one form or other, present themselves in the creed and legends of every land; to discover in the *Vedas*, or most ancient religious monuments of India and Persia, a host of Gods and demi-gods, of Genii, of giants, of monsters and spirits which, under divers denominations and costumes varied according to the nature of the climate and the people, recur in the Mythology of Greece and Rome, of Scandinavia and of Germany.

Thus, the legend of Wieland or Veland smith, the Vöelungr of the *Edda*, is evidently but another version of the Hellenic Vulcan, or of Dedalus, or of both blended together, the origin of which lies deep in eastern fable; for the Aryans too adore a God, *Twachri*, who forges the thunderbolts of Indra, as Vulcan forges those of Jove.

According to the northern tradition, Wieland, the son of a King of Finland and celebrated for his skill in

working metals, had, with his two brothers, fixed his abode on the shores of the lake of Ulf. One morning, they beheld three lovely maidens, seated beside the waters, spinning flax. These were *Valkyres* or secondary divinities to whom was confided the fate of battles and who, wearied apparently of the noise and tumult of the fight, had sought this sequestered spot for repose and tranquillity.

The three brothers wedded the fair ones and, for seven years, lived together in uninterrupted happiness; but at length the sound of the distant war trumpet reaching the ears of the maidens roused their martial instincts, and donning their robes of feathers they flew away to return no more! The two elder brothers speedily consoled themselves by taking other wives; but Wieland with praiseworthy fidelity remained in lonely widowhood, wiling away the weary days by fabricating articles of the rarest workmanship. Unfortunately, Nidad, King of Sweden, hearing of his wondrous skill, sent a body of men to seize him and bear him to his court. Wieland was a philosopher; he bowed to destiny and sought to win his captor's favour by forging, for his use, swords of wondrous sharpness and bucklers that none could pierce.

But all this only increased the desire of the King to retain him captive and, to prevent his escape, the perfidious and cruel monarch had the sinews of his legs cut through and placed him on a desert island where he forced him to work night and day.

Wieland submitted to his fate with apparent resignation, but in secret planned a dire retribution. One day, when the King's sons came to visit his forge,

he slew them both, made drinking cups of their skulls and breast-clasps of their teeth which he presented to the unsuspecting parents! At length, he found the means of manufacturing a feather coat, like that of the Valkyre his faithless wife, and flew away, carrying with him the king's daughter and, while hovering in the air beyond the reach of his tormentor, apprized the wretched and conscience-stricken King of the nature and extent of his revenge. (1)

Here, with divers variations, we have the history of the Cretan hero. The wings of Grecian fable are indeed replaced by a plumed coat. Wieland's brother, Eigel, trying the same bold experiment falls crushed and bleeding to the earth, victim, like Icarus, to his own presumption. — We are told also that the celebrated Greek traveller Pytheas discovered, among the inhabitants of the isles of Eolus, now the Lipari, the singular custom of exposing near the Volcano, where it was believed Vulcan had fixed his abode, the metal they desired fashioned into a weapon. In Germany a similar superstition existed until the end of the last century, and the peasant, as he placed a piece of iron by the road side, enjoyed the full conviction that, ere morning, it would turn into a horse-shoe! This singular practice found its way to our own land and, not very long ago, in Berkshire, a stone was pointed out near the White Horse Hill where, according to popular belief, the same wonderful transformation was effected, on condition, however, of laying a silver shilling beside the iron and tying the horse itself to a post near at hand.

---

(1) *Wilkina Saga.*

The most ancient relics of the German tongue that have come down to us, like those of all other nations, bear a religious character; they consist of two incantations, discovered only in 1841 in the convent of Merseberg, and afford a glimpse, though but a faint one, of the rites of Paganism in the 'old forests of Germany. — The most important of these, though commonplace enough in itself — it is but a spell to cure a lame horse — would seem to set at rest a long contended question and establish the identity of the German and Scandinavian mythology.

Phoal and Wodin went to the wood;  
 There the foot was wrenched of Bolder's colt;  
 Then Frea charmed him,  
 And her sister Folla;  
 Then Wodin charmed him as well as he could,  
 With the wrench of the bone  
 And the wrench of the blood,  
 Blood to blood, and limb to limb,  
 As tho' they were glued together. (1)

Here we have the principal deities of the Edda; the mighty Wodin, reigning in splendour in his palace of the Walhalla mounted on his magic courser, his irresistible spear in his hand! Frea, his sister, with her train of attendant goddesses, and the just and gentle Balder whose existence alone preserved the peace of the universe and whose death — for the Gods of Scandinavia were not immortal — was to be the signal of universal destruction!

(1) This incantation has already been made known to English readers by the learned labours of Mr. Kemble: Hist. of the Anglo-Saxons.

That the religion of the inhabitants of the north differed greatly, in different localities, cannot admit of a doubt. Caesar was probably perfectly justified in affirming that they worshipped the Sun, Moon and Fire; but the tribes that fell under his observation led a migratory existence, and their creed, probably, was not of a very complicated nature. Tacitus, on the contrary, in asserting that they adored Mercury and Hertha, or Mother Earth, was misled by a certain similarity in the attributes ascribed to their deities and those of Rome. —

Thus Mercury was, in all probability, no other than Wodin or Odin; for, although the affinity between the two is not particularly striking, save that the Scandinavian God was supposed, like Hermes, to be perpetually travelling from one place to the other, yet both preside over the same planets; the fourth day consecrated to Mercury being called in the old Teuton language "Gudin's or Odin's day". Hertha answered to the Greek Ceres. Her touch brought fruitfulness and fertility to the earth. When, invisible to human eye, she drove through the land in her car drawn by white oxen, the weapons fell from the hands of the fiercest warriors, flowers sprang up on her path and all nature seemed to rejoice. —

"They believe", says Tacitus, "that she interests herself in human affairs and at times visits the earth. In an island, (<sup>1</sup>) in the ocean, lies a consecrated wood and, in this wood, a car dedicated to the goddess; the priest alone has the right to touch it; he knows the moment when the goddess is present in the sanctuary;

---

(<sup>1</sup>) This island is believed to be Heligoland.

She departs instantly, drawn by her oxen, and the priest follows with profound veneration; these are days of rejoicing in every spot where she deigns to abide! No more combats! No more warfare! The sword is hidden! It is the only time when the rude warriors of the north know or value peace! But, ere long, the priest conducts the goddess, wearied with the sight of mortals, once more to the temple; the car with its curtains and, if we can believe it, the Goddess herself are plunged into a solitary lake; slaves perform this office and the waves directly swallow them up! A secret terror, a mysterious horror cover this imposing rite which is beheld only by those who are about to perish." (1)

In this graphic picture we perceive that blending of the stern and the tender which forms so peculiar a feature in northern mythology.

. Thus again when Loki, the enemy of the gods, is at last seized and chained like Prometheus to a rock while a serpent, hanging over him, distils his venom on his brow, happier than the Titan of antiquity, it is not to the transient pity of the nymphs of air or ocean that he need turn for consolation! he has one friend who never forsakes him; his wife Siguin sits beside him, catching the drops as they fall in a bowl she holds before his face, and it is only when she is forced to turn aside to empty the overflowing cup, that the poison reaches the victim who writhes and struggles in his agony till the very earth shakes to its foundation! (2)

---

(1) Grimm's Mythologie. Vol. 1, p. 215.

(2) „Ältere Edda“.

True, there is much that is fierce and savage in the religion of Odin. At first sight it appears a mere divinization of a life of combat, an effort of the human mind to explain the causes of those mighty natural phenomena, that perpetual struggle between the good and the evil followed too often by the triumph, temporary at least, of the latter, which could not but strike the untutored imagination with awe and amazement and, probably, led to that belief in two antagonistic principles which we find in all primitive religious creeds.

But, beneath these rude symbols, an attentive observer may discern vague indications of a higher and more ennobling doctrine! An echo, faint and indistinct indeed, of those purer conceptions of one omniscient being, instilled doubtless by God himself into the patriarchs of mankind, and never wholly lost. Thus Odin is called *Allfater* or “*Father of all*” and, after the destruction of Heaven and Earth, so fearfully described in the Edda, and its renewal in a brighter and better form, we are told that the souls of the wicked go to “Nostrate” or *Leichenland*, that is: “land of corpses,” to eternal woe, and those of the righteous to Gimeil or Himmel to endless joy. Here again we trace an analogy with the creed of the east.—In the Indian Epic, the *Mâhâbârata*, which embodies, to a considerable degree, the religious system as well as the philosophy of the Hindoos, the hero of the lay, the Pandou Prince Youdrichtera, who has distinguished himself for his virtue, his justice, and his compassion, who will not desert even the poor dog who has attached himself to his footsteps on his

passage to another world, though by retaining him he runs the risk of losing the eternal crown — is permitted to enter paradise in his earthly form and assume, while yet in mortal guise, the glories of immortality! (1)

The connexion between God and man, which is the ruling principle of German Mythology, considerably facilitated the introduction of Christianity, otherwise so opposed to all the habits, to all the prejudices of the wild tribes of the North. Accustomed to regard themselves as the sons of Odin and, believing in a future existence, rude and unspiritual indeed, but still embodying that most important part of the faith in immortality, the undying nature of the soul, they listened with less repugnance to tenets which invested the supreme being with still higher attributes and taught them that he watched perpetually over the destinies of Mankind. The sacrifice and atonement of Christ did not startle them. They had been dimly shadowed forth in the destruction and resurrection of Balder and his brother Gods. — The place of the heathen Goddesses, the Nornes and the Vallkyres, was in some measure supplied by the Virgin and the Saints, and, as to the rest of the supernatural world, Elves, Fays and Goblins, they grafted them upon their new faith and continued to believe in them as devoutly as before.

The Roman historian affirms that the Germans had neither shrines nor images. It was in the depths of their mighty forests, beneath the shadows of their

---

(1) Song of the Mahaprâsthama Kaparva, V. 70.

gloomy pines, that their holy rites were celebrated. That this opinion was long general cannot be disputed. Even now, in the dense woods of Bohemia, more than one spot is pointed out as having been the scene where Velleda or Auronia, the famed priestesses of the Teutonic tribes, muttered their incantations and wrought their magic spells. (1) It is possible, however, that temples and idols may have existed in the interior of the country where the Romans had never penetrated. At all events there were both in the second half of the fourth century; for Ulphilas, the celebrated Bishop of the Visigoths, when recapitulating the persecutions to which he and his co-religionists were exposed from those among his compatriots who still adhered to the ancient faith, expressly mentions that the king Athanaric ordered an image (evidently of some deity) to be placed, in a car before the abodes of all suspected of leaning to the Christian faith and, if they refused to fall down and worship it, their houses were to be burnt over their heads. (2) A still more incontestable proof may be adduced in the Idol, found by Charlemagne in Saxony, representing the gigantic figure of an armed man, in one hand a standard, in the other a balance, emblematic of the uncertain chances of war.

The Priests were not a sect set apart from the rest of the community, as among the Gauls and Britons. (3)

(1) Grimm's Mythologie, vol. 1st. p. 282.

(2) Ulphilas Leben und Lehre von Watz.

(3) Barth's Urgeschichte.

In moments of difficulty they were invested with the functions of statesmen and generals, often marching in the van of the army, exciting the troops to daring by their exhortations and example; but they never exercised the same influence over the minds of the people as among the Celtic races.

Women were admitted into the priesthood and, when 113 B. C. the Roman army was nearly destroyed by the Teutons and Cimbrians, as they poured down the Styrian Alps into Italy, Strabo describes their priestesses who, with their hair floating wildly in the wind, bare feet and leathern girdle, cut the throats of the prisoners and sacrificed them to their gods. (1)

Women, indeed, play an important part in the mythology and legends of the North. The *Nornes*, answering to the Grecian fates, were women; so were the Valkyres or warlike maidens who bore the souls of the warriors from the fields of battle to the halls of the Walhalla and, indeed, the sex altogether occupied a far higher position among the Germans than among the civilized nations of Greece and Rome. "It is believed", says Tacitus, "that there is something holy and prophetic about them and, therefore, the warriors neither despise their counsels, nor disregard their responses. We have beheld, in the reign of Vespasian, Velleda long reverenced by many as a deity. Aurima, moreover, and several others were formerly held in equal veneration, but not with a servile flattery, as though they made them goddesses."

---

(1) Strabo, Lib. 7.

Elves and dwarfs are continually introduced in all Teutonic lays and legends. The Paganism of the north less graceful, less redolent of images of beauty, than that of Greece, had still the same tendency to people earth, air and water with beings of its own creation. Thus the rivers had their Undines, the ocean its Nixes; the mountain caverns their Gnomes, the woods their Sprites. Christianity did not deny their existence; but, even as it transformed the divinities of Heathen mythology from Gods to Devils, so it invested these supernatural races with something of a demoniac character. They were not held to be immortal. Though permitted to attain an age far beyond that granted to mankind, they were doomed like them to perish and, less happy, were denied the hope of Salvation, unless purchased by a union with creatures of earthly mould, or by some other conditions still more difficult to accomplish.

The fairy system throughout Europe bears such undeniable traces of family resemblance that it seems probable it is derived from one common source, that of the North diffused by the Gothic and Teutonic tribes in the course of their conquests and migrations, and itself a faint reflection of Eastern mythology. In the *prose Edda* we find both Elves and dwarfs, under the title of "Dackalfer" or dark Elves and "Löesalfer" or light ones, who wore shining robes whiter than snow. The dark Elves who are evidently synonymous with the Duerger or dwarfs, have huge heads and short legs and arms; they are clad in raiment of dark colour and are famed for their skill

in working metals. (1) Odin, we are told, formed them of the dust of the earth, or according to another version, from the flesh of the giant Ymir of which he had already made Heaven and Earth. (2) In the song of "Alvis", an episode of the Edda, we find that Alvis, a dwarf who has travelled through the nine worlds, has acquired such wondrous and varied knowledge that, during a whole night, he answers every question propounded by Thor, who hopes, by convicting him of ignorance, to prevent his proposed union with a maid of the race of the Asas. (3)

Then, there is the dwarf Brock who fabricates hair of gold for Siva to supply the locks of which the mischievous Loki has robbed him. (4)

The *Elves*, of whom however we find comparatively little mention in German legends, are well disposed to man, though not without a spice of mischief. They wear shining robes and crowns of gold, like king Elberic in the "Ortnit Lied", but their dwelling place never seems to have been exactly ascertained. *Dwarfs*, on the contrary, are perpetually making their appearance. They consist of the Cobolds or house spirits who, like the Brownies of the Highlands, love to nestle beside the domestic hearth and, if well treated, attach themselves to the fortunes of the family, and the *Gnomes* who haunt deserted mills and lonely mansions, or dwell deep in the caverns of the earth; the mountain

(1) Grimm's Mythologie vol. 1st. p. 413.

(2) The Voluspa.

(3) The Atlas-mal in the Edda.

(4) Edda.

echoes are but the mingled sounds of their voices as they mock the cries of the wanderer, and the fissures in the rocks the entrances and exits to their subterranean abodes. Here they have heaped up countless treasures brought from the mines of gold; silver and precious stones, which for centuries belonged to them alone undisturbed by the foot of man. Not that they have any use for these sparkling treasures. They love them only for their brilliancy which lights up their darksome haunts, and here they dwell, passing their time in fabricating costly armour inlaid with precious stones, or at times wandering for a while to upper Earth. The following legend proves that the belief in the existence of these mysterious little beings did not disappear with the dark ages.

One day, a certain Dietrich, a workman in Swabia, was sitting by the casement, *smoking his pipe*, when he noticed a red cap lying on the ground beside him; he picked it up and was about to place it on his own head, when he suddenly perceived, standing before him, a very little man with a long brown mantle, and sparkling deep-sunk eyes. Dietrich knew directly it was a Cobold, but, being a curious wight and afraid neither of man nor demon, he resolved to make the most of the adventure; so he absolutely refused to surrender the cap, save on condition that the Gnome should lead him to his gloomy retreat. The terms were agreed on and they went forth together. Ere long they reached a cavern in the rocks. They entered and descended, by a steep and winding path, into the mysterious depths below. Here Dietrich found

himself in a spacious hall, lighted by torches in sockets of beryl and crystal; the pavement was inlaid with precious stones, and all around stood little men, the tallest not a foot high, busily employed, some in beating out gold and silver of which they were forming shields, helmets, and goblets; some in polishing gems of rare beauty. They looked up as Dietrich entered, but did not leave off their work, nor take any further notice of him; but his guide remained beside him bidding him fear nothing, for he should fare well and merrily among them. After a while the guest grew weary of confinement, on which the attendant dwarf led him to a beautiful valley diversified with glen and wood and water. The grass was enamelled with flowers of every hue; the trees threw their long shadows over the green sward and, amid their foliage, fluttered birds of varied plumage.

Above them rose what seemed the vault of Heaven; but instead of sun or moon or stars, were immense diamonds and carbuncles which shed a soft, yet radiant light upon the scene below. But there was no sound! All was still as death, nor was it ever either so dark or so bright as upon Earth. Here Dietrich lingered he knew not how long and, even, when he at last returned to the upper world, he would often sigh for the kingdom of the gnomes. (1)

In the neighbourhood of Carlsbad and Ems are found grottoes which still bear the name of the

---

(1) Das Kloster. Scheibl. Vol. 3. p. 200.

grottoes of the dwarfs. The little beings who frequented them appear to have belonged to an intermediate class between the Elves of light and the Cobolds. Though inhabiting the caverns of the rocks, they were kindly disposed and even pious. Somehow or other, however, they had become subject to the spell of a mighty enchanter and, one day, as they were kneeling in prayer, the wizard, indignant at this homage to a faith he abhorred, changed them all to stone. A legend, somewhat similar in its nature, is attached to the wild and beautiful assemblage of rocks at the foot of the Bastei, in Saxon Switzerland; only, this time, the dwarfs were assembled to celebrate a wedding. The Cobolds frequently fixed their abodes in human dwellings where, if well treated, they assisted the cooks and other servants in their duties. This good treatment consisted in placing food, at stated epochs, in the spots they themselves designated; if this was omitted, or if they were too much teased in any other way, they would abandon the house, or punish their tormentors by throwing over the saucepans and poking out the fire. We know that this superstition was not confined to Germany, that it existed throughout the whole of Europe in the middle ages, and even long afterwards. Don Augustin Calmet in his dissertation upon apparitions, Vampyres &c., tells us that there are goblins of several sorts of which the greater part are not mischievous, but, on the contrary, very serviceable; dressing, feeding, and taking care of horses, which they sometimes do at the cost of a next neighbour "whose corn they have been known to steal, to give it to those they have under their care." And adding, in a

tone which proves his scepticism on the subject is not quite so great as he would fain make it appear, "that these stories are so ridiculous, one should hardly believe them without seeing them one's self, or at least hearing them from eye-witnesses." To one, indeed, he seems to give implicit credence, namely that of a gentleman who was said to have a sort of familiar spirit who always waited upon him, brushed his shoes and his clothes and, when he was gone into the country, came home before him and got ready the chamber for his reception. —

Really one is inclined to envy those who lived in the pleasant days when such devoted and useful servants could be had for nothing, save a little food and a few kind words. It is true that, like everything else in this world, the advantage was not unmixed. At times, if thoroughly aroused, the goblin domestics would evince their indignation by acts of vengeance of a dark and fearful dye. Trithemius, in his Chronicle of 1431, tells us of a spirit which, for some time, haunted the diocese of Hildesheim in Saxony and went by the name of the spirit with the cap, from a cap he always wore. Sometimes he was visible in one shape, sometimes in another and sometimes not at all. — On one occasion a scullion, with whom he had contracted an intimate friendship and for whom he had performed many little services, having affronted him, he complained to the head cook, but receiving no satisfaction, thought fit to take the matter into his own hands. Accordingly, while the scullion was asleep, he seized, strangled, tore him to pieces and boiled him for his dinner. He was then, continues

the narrator, about to wreak his vengeance on the other servants, but the affair being brought before the Bishop, the Spirit was exorcised and disappeared to return no more.

The dwarf of king Goldemar who is, more than once, introduced in German traditions, lived for many years with the knight Niveling of Hardenberg, sleeping in the same bed. — He played delightfully on the harp, was passionately fond of gambling, always paid in good solid gold and never complained however much he lost. He conversed gaily and wittily and had his place regularly reserved for him at table; but his shadow alone was visible. Yet he could be felt though not seen and his hand was icy cold! A curious wight having strewn ashes on his path in hopes to discover at least the trace of his footsteps, the enraged dwarf, who discovered the trick, came behind, seized and cut him to pieces, threw the morsels into a saucepan, cooked and eat them and, from that moment, disappeared, leaving an inscription above the chamber door, declaring that henceforth the house of Hardenberg should be as unfortunate as it had hitherto been blessed!

When not insulted, however, the Cobolds clung to their masters with undeviating and, sometimes, wearisome fidelity. A Cobold served a cloister at Mecklenburg, for thirty years, without ever failing in his duties a single day.

A Polish tradition relates that an unknown individual presented himself to a certain nobleman and offered his services. The contract was already signed when the nobleman, perceiving that the new comer had horse-feet, declared he would have

nothing to do with him. The stranger, however, insisted on his right and vowed he would enter into his service, whether he liked it or not. From this moment, though unseen, he fulfilled every duty. Gradually the household became accustomed to him with the exception of the lady who, in hopes of getting rid of him, induced her husband to remove to another estate. They set off accordingly and were already some miles on their way, when, the road becoming extremely rough, the carriage nearly upset. The lady screamed with terror, when a well known voice exclaimed: "do not be frightened! I am here." Struck by this persevering fidelity, or convinced that, do what they might, they could not get rid of their self appointed attendant, the family returned to their former residence and the Cobold remained with them till his term of service expired. (1)

If lay and legend tell us true, the House Goblin was as familiar a guest, in olden days, at the *English* as at the German fireside. Milton in his immortal verse records

How the drudging goblin sweat  
To earn his cream bowl duly set.

But Teutonic Elfin lore has nothing precisely analogous to that little race which Chaucer, Spencer and Shakespeare have endowed with immortality, let who will deny them the boon! Those tiny beings whom we have all seen in our waking dreams in the days

---

(1) Grimm vol. 1. p 480.

of childhood, in glen or forest, who, in their robes of shining green begemmed with diamond dew drops, trip it merrily in the soft light of the summer moon, who weave the delicate tissue of the gossamer, and are the very incarnation of aerial grace and loveliness! Even if Elberic be the original of Oberon, as has been affirmed by more than one author, German and English, especially by the ingenious and learned writer, (1) to whom the fairy family in every part of the world, (if indeed any have survived the introduction of railroads and steam-engines), are so deeply indebted for the pains he has taken to collect their scattered records, still, where in olden German lay do we find a Titania with her coronet of "Yellows in the full blown rose", her robes of pansy pink and primrose leaves; a queen Mab

Whose chariot is an empty Hazle Nut  
Made by the joiner Squirrel or old Grub.

Neither is there any sprite exactly answering to our Robin Goodfellow; the German Cobolds are mischievous only when roused by wrong or insult, not from the mere love of sport and fun like Puck. In short, without intending the slightest offence to the numerous and highly respectable race of Teutonic Elves, we must venture to maintain that our fairies are, on the whole, a more mirthful, graceful and ideal race than their German brethren and, that the influence of the green valleys and velvet turf of England, that

---

(1) Keightly's fairy Mythology.

turf found in no land save ours, has acted very favorably upon them.

But the Germans have another description of Sprites, the Woodfays, somewhat larger in stature than the Cobolds, thin and old-looking, attired in moss of varied hues. They are notorious for that habit of child stealing to which all the fairies of England and Scotland are addicted, but which, in Germany, seems confined to this particular class. The males are rarely-visible, but the females will often appear when the peasants' wives are baking bread and ask for a morsel, or they will bring a spinning wheel to be repaired and prove their gratitude by letting fall a piece of the broken wood which invariably turns to gold, or by giving their benefactress a reel of thread which can never be exhausted.

The German Elves, like those of every other clime, have an irresistible propensity to dance and song, more especially the Nixes (the Danish Necks) or water spirits who, rising from their river or Ocean home, will seat themselves on the shore and pour forth such sweet music as to enchant all who hear them. They are ever ready to impart their wondrous skill for the hope and promise of salvation.

A Nix was wiling away the hours by touching his harp when two children, playing near, exclaimed: "Nix, why sittest thou here and playest? Thou wilt not be saved for all that." Then the Nix began to weep bitterly, threw away his harp and sunk into the depths of the water. When the boys returned, they told their father what had occurred. "You were wrong,"

said the good man; "go back and comfort the Nix and give him hopes of salvation;" the boys obeyed; they found the spirit once more sitting on the rocks weeping bitterly. "Weep not! oh Nix," they cried, "our father has told us that thy redeemer liveth." Then the Nix took up his harp and played and sung till the sun had long set. (1)

But the Nixes are not always so gentle and inoffensive. Like the Scottish Kelpies, there is an undercurrent of cruelty in their nature, which occasionally displays itself in the darkest hues. One of their most ardent desires, fully explained and justified by the condition affixed to their salvation, is to lure young maidens to their watery domains and force or persuade them to become their brides. If they submit they are treated with all the courtesy of which the Nixes are capable. They may sit upon the rocks and wreath their tresses with sea weeds, coral and pearly shells and sing to the Seals or the Walruses all day long, if they please; but, if they manifest the desire to return to their home and kindred, a streak of blood, on the surface of the waters, tells the dark story of their doom.

These are but a few of the romantic superstitions which once peopled the woods and waters of Germany, and which, though fast disappearing before the advancing light of civilization, still linger in some of the wilder and more sequestered regions of that far spreading land. There are the Wilkyres, or youthful virgins, who have died upon their bridal eve and

---

(1) Grimm's Mythologie. Vol. 1st p. 464.

who, unable to rest in their graves, return to earth, when the moon rides high in the heavens, and dance in her silver rays. But woe to him who may chance to meet them! Surrounding him, the spirits draw him with them in their magic ring, till, faint and exhausted, he sinks lifeless to the earth. (1)

Scarcely less dangerous are the river maids who, rising to the surface of the stream, lure the unwary wanderer into the depths below. The swan maidens are more harmless and equally lovely; they can assume or lay aside their downy plumage at will.

There are the white women who often appear at early dawn, or dewy evening, with their pale sad faces and shadowy forms; these are the Goddesses of ancient paganism condemned to wander through ages to expiate the guilt of having received divine worship and sentenced, at length, to eternal punishment unless redeemed by mortal aid.

At certain times, they are permitted to appear to human view to seek that which alone can procure them salvation. A fisherman, in the neighbourhood of Fieben, suddenly beheld a white woman standing before him; "home, home!" she cried, "thy wife has brought a boy into the world; carry it hither; let me kiss it that I may be redeemed." The fisherman, amazed, hastened to his cottage and found all as the white woman had said; but fearing, very naturally, to trust his new born infant into the hands of this unearthly being till protected by the holy rite of baptism, he had this ceremony performed, and

---

(1) Wolf's Mythologie der Elfen.

then bore it to the sea shore where he found the white woman weeping bitterly, for the condition affixed to her salvation was that the child should not be baptized! and still, at times, does she appear upon the shore sighing and lamenting! (1)

There is a more pathetic tale of an infant who, rambling in the forest while his parents were gathering wood, suddenly beheld a lovely female form who, with sweet smiles and caresses, lured him to her side. For hours the parents sought in vain their darling; at last he appeared covered with flowers which he told them the white virgin had gathered for him, from her garden, and that he would shew them the way. They followed and soon reached a fairy-like spot, gay with blossoms of every hue though it was still mid-winter, and the virgin stood in the midst of her flowers and motioned them to draw near. They were afraid, and with their child hastened from the spot. But, from that hour, the boy grew sad and pale; his wonted sports pleased him no longer; his former playmates wearied him. Even his parents seemed to have lost their hold upon his heart; he called perpetually for the white maiden and, at length, faded and died! (2)

Among the Goddesses who, in the form of white women, were long believed to exercise an influence, for good or ill, on human affairs, Hertha, whose worship is recorded by Tacitus, and who was designated in the middle ages as *Perchta* and Frigg, spouse to the mighty Odin, play

---

(1) Scheibler, das Kloster. Vol. 3.

(2) Sagen von Schleswig Holstein. p. 94.

the most conspicuous parts and figure in many a wild legend, proving how strong was the hold which the creed of their ancestors retained on the minds of the Germans, long after its idols had been destroyed and its shrines broken. Hertha who still, it seems, cherished the beneficent disposition ascribed to her in old pagan mythology, continued to watch over and aid mankind; nor was it till driven away by the calumnies of which she was the victim, that she finally abandoned them to their own devices.

There was one spot which enjoyed her peculiar favor, and the inhabitants still point out the traces of the plough upon the steep sides of the hills where nothing now grows, save thorns and nettles. The grass was greener, the flowers fairer than in any of the neighbouring hamlets, for here Perchta and her attendant dwarfs had fixed their abode: it was her hand which invisibly fertilized the soil. The little men dwelt in crowds in the neighbourhood, and all the inhabitants had learnt to know and love them. Often, when the peasant was driving back his waggon laden with the products of the harvest, a merry little Elf, his brows crowned with golden ears; might be seen perched on the foremost ox. When the rosy fruit was shaken from the boughs, a ministering dwarf would fall with it and vanish with a mischievous laugh. The tiny race was skilled in all the mysteries of agriculture and, when asked how they learnt them, they would reply from our queen, Perchta. *She* sows and ploughs under the earth, while you sow and plough above it. At her command we water your fields and meadows, and, when it is too dry, we direct the subterranean

sources to the roots of your flowers and fruits. Thus did the happy inhabitants of the village lead, for centuries, an enviable existence; every thing prospered in their hands. At length, unluckily for them, came a man from a far distant land who told them Perchta must belong to the race of evil spirits; that her very services imperilled the eternal weal of those who accepted them; that her attendant dwarfs were the souls of little children, dead while yet unbaptized who fell beneath her sway; that, once a year, the night before the feast of the three Kings, was she permitted to work her will on upper earth and they yet would find, when too late, that all her apparent beneficence was but a snare to lure them to destruction. These words did not fall on an unfruitful soil; forgetting all they owed her, the villagers began to look with dread and suspicion on those very beings they had once regarded as their best and dearest friends. When they appeared, instead of welcoming them delightedly as heretofore, they shrank back with horror. The dwarfs, wounded to the heart, withdrew into the recesses of the earth and, in the course of a year, scarcely one was to be seen.

At length the feast of the three Kings arrived and, at midnight, the ferryman went forth to prepare his bark to steer the inhabitants across to offer up their devotions at an altar on the other side of the river. Just as he reached the stream, he perceived a tall woman with mournful air, surrounded by groups of little figures all weeping and lamenting. It was Perchta and her dwarfs about to quit for ever the scene of their labours and their

joys. The Goddess commanded the terrified ferryman to row her over and, on reaching the opposite shore, broke off a piece of the oar, which she presented him for his pains. It was the last gift mortal ever received from her hand and, as usual, it speedily turned into gold. But, from that hour, the meadows began to lose their fertility, the trees withered, the flowers faded; the inhabitants, finding their toil vain, abandoned the spot; where once stood smiling hamlets and fields golden with corn, or covered with trees and flowers, all now is lone and desolate. (¹)

Frigg has left far different reminiscences. She appears in the traditions of the middle ages as an ogress, a fearful sorceress! But we refer such of our readers who may be curious in mythological lore and who have the patience to wade through twelve closely printed volumes, to a work we have already quoted more than once, "das Kloster", an assemblage of German popular traditions, superstitions, &c. &c., of every imaginable description, from the days of paganism down to the middle of the 17th century. Here we not only find all those legends from which German poets have drawn so largely, but discover into what extravagances the human mind may fall, when it ventures forth into the domain of the ideal, unguided by that divine light which alone can serve as a beacon to direct it in safety.

Giants play a conspicuous part both in northern mythology and in the lays of the middle ages. In

---

(¹) Görner's *Völksagen*, p. 149.

the Edda they are the enemies of the Gods and long bid defiance to their power.

The terrible Thor, finding the Giant Skirmar asleep under an oak and snoring, struck him a tremendous blow with his hammer; on which the giant awaking coolly inquired whether a leaf had dropped on his head; then seeking another tree and lying down once more, he again fell into a profound slumber. This time Thor struck harder, but the giant only exclaimed "did an acorn fall upon my forehead?" In the traditions of almost every land cruelty, malignity and violence are the attributes of this race. In many they are cannibals like Polyphemus in the Odyssey and Hidimba the Rakchaksa, or giant of the Indian Epic the Mahabharata, the monster who, "black as the clouds in the season of rains, his mouth armed with long fangs, with fiery red beard and hair, and shoulders large as a mighty tree", stands watching the children of Pandou as they lie slumbering with their mother in the depths of the forest, and prepares to pounce on and devour them! Nothing can be described with more revolting truth than the fierce and sensual delight with which the cannibal anticipates the promised repast. "At length", he exclaims, "I see the nourishment that suits me. My eight sharp and pointed teeth, at length I shall plunge them into those fair tender bodies!" (1)

In this monster and his sister, we find the prototypes of all the ogres and ogresses of children's tales from the days of Jack the Giant-killer down-

(1) See song of Andeparva in the Mahabharata.

wards. The Ogress, if we remember rightly, was not insensible to human pity. *She* saved little Tom Thumb and many a poor wight beside. Even so the Rakchaksa's sister is moved by the manly grace of the sleeping heroes, especially of Bahmiasena, the most warlike of the family, who is keeping watch and ward over his slumbering brethren. Transforming herself into a fairy of wondrous beauty, she would fain induce him to fly with her from this fearful spot! and, when proudly refusing, he awaits undauntedly the approach of the monster and, after a fearful combat, vanquishes and destroys him, she still follows his footsteps and, at length, prevails on him to listen to her prayers and to wend with her to an enchanted garden, where, for a while, he lingers by her side. In German legends, however, the giants are not always hostile to man, as is evident from the charming tale attached to the Castle of Nideck, in which the daughter of the giant, finding in her walk a ploughman, carries him off, team and all, to her father who angrily bids her bear them again to where she found them.

---

## CHAPTER II.

TRANSLATION OF THE SCRIPTURES BY ULPILAS. — RISE AND PROGRESS OF GERMAN POETRY. — LAYS OF THE GERMANS AND THE FRANKS. — THE BARDI. — SHORT HISTORICAL RESUME OF EUROPE AND GERMANY FROM THE 4TH TO THE 9TH CENTURY. — THE GERMAN LANGUAGE. — CYCLE OF HEROIC POEMS. — DIETRICH OF BERNE OR THEODORIC THE GREAT — THE WEISSBRUNNEN GEBET. — THE HILDEBRAND'S LIED. — WALTER OF AQUITAINE, BEOWULF.

The second great monument of the ancient German language carries us back to those days when the mild light of Christianity first began to diffuse itself over the nations of the north, like a ray of sunshine struggling through dense and massive clouds. It is the translation of the sacred scriptures by Ulphilas, Bishop of the Visigoths, that people destined to play so prominent a part in the conquest of the Roman world. It dates from the middle of the 4th century, the period of the struggle between Paganism and Christianity.

As early as the year 112 A. D. the faith of Christ had found disciples among the Teutonic tribes whither it had been borne by Roman captives, and Ulphilas was the most fervent and most influential of its apostles.

The important part played by the good bishop in the affairs of his time and more especially in the establishment of his countrymen in the Roman territories, when flying before the invading Huns, is matter of history.<sup>(1)</sup> The result of his counsels, so disastrous to the already tottering empire, deeply affected him and not improbably hastened his demise, for he did not long survive the defeat of the Emperor Verus and the destruction of his army by those very Goths who, but a brief period before, had implored as fugitives the pity and hospitality of Rome. Ulphilas died at Constantinople whither he had betaken himself to defend one of his countrymen accused of heresy (A. D. 388). In his translation he intentionally omitted the book of Kings lest it should stimulate the martial ardour of his countrymen. Down to the 9th century this version was held in high estimation and seems to have been in general use. Gradually it fell into complete oblivion, its existence being learnt only through the testimony of certain Greek ecclesiastical writers. It was not till the end of the 16th century that Arnold Mercador, a geometer in the service of the landgrave of Hesse, William the fourth, heard the rumour that an old version of the four Gospels<sup>(2)</sup> was preserved in a neighbouring abbey; his curiosity being excited, he made the necessary researches and verified the truth of the report. The volume written on parchment in silver letters on a purple ground, was carried forth

(1) *Leben und Lehren von Ulphilas* by Waitz.

(2) See "Bibel Ulphilas" edited by Wahn Weissenfels and by Gabelentz, Leipz. 1843.

from the cloister in which it had been so long buried and borne in state to the Public Library at Cassel, where it remained for a considerable time.

It was subsequently however removed to Prague and, when that city was taken by Count Königsmark, was carried to Sweden where, bound in massive silver, it is still preserved at the Cathedral at Upsal under the title of the "Silver Codex".<sup>(1)</sup> Two hundred and fifty years later, another Manuscript, likewise by Ulphilas, was discovered among the treasures of the convent of Bobbio in Lombardy. It consists of a translation of St. Paul's Epistles. These precious relics of antiquity are written in the Mœso-Gothic tongue, a modification of that in which the incantations are couched.<sup>(2)</sup>

To judge aright of the merits and labours of Ulphilas, we must remember that he had to form a special alphabet for the use of his countrymen, the art of writing being unknown to the Goths and the surrounding tribes. Not indeed but that they possessed some vague notions of alphabetic lore. Certain enigmatical characters had been imported among them, whence or by whom has never been very clearly ascertained; but their use and meaning were confined exclusively to their priests and augurs who concealed both with jealous care from the rest of the community and employed them as charms wherewith to work their magic spells. These mysterious symbols,

---

<sup>(1)</sup> See *Waisz über das Leben und Lehre von Ulphilas*.

<sup>(2)</sup> The guardians of the Library at Milan boast of having in their possession some further Epistles of Ulphilas but without sufficient grounds.

mentioned in Tacitus, were evidently no other than the Runes (<sup>1</sup>) since discovered in Germany, Scandinavia and our own England, to the interpretation of which so much labour and science have been devoted, and the alphabet of Ulphilas consisted in a combination of these characters with those used by the Greeks and Romans. (<sup>2</sup>)

For nearly four hundred years after that translation of the sacred volume, by which the venerable bishop of the Goths sought to instruct and civilize his people, no trace of literature of any description can be discovered among the Teutonic tribes. That, like all other barbarous nations, they had their lays cannot admit of a doubt. Tacitus, indeed, expressly mentions the war-songs which, in the silence of the night, resounded from the barbarian camp on the eve of battle and, particularly, the *Bardi* or wild choral chaunts, broken by the shields held by the warriors before their lips while they poured them forth. (<sup>3</sup>)

Of this species of song, common alike to all the races of the North, we have a specimen in the "Ode of Ragnar, the Sea-king", that hardy Scandinavian pirate so often cited with terror in the annals of the Middle Ages and whose glory is the theme of many a wild "Saga" of his native land. In these strange productions, which blend as usual truth and fable, we see him, like the Siegfried of the "Nibelungen", rescuing a lovely maiden from a dragon and making

---

(<sup>1</sup>) Grimm's *deutsche Runen*.

(<sup>2</sup>) Tac. Germ.

(<sup>3</sup>) Tacit. Germ.

her his bride and, after her death, wedding a heroine endowed at once with miraculous strength and all the gentle charms of her sex; then sweeping through the deep with his conquering band, defying the hurricane, sailing up the Seine and menacing Paris and, at last after countless victories, taken prisoner while invading the territories of Ella, king of Northumberland, and perishing, not as he had dreamt in the heat of battle, but in a loathsome dungeon stung to death by serpents! (1) Yet it was here, in the midst of the most fearful agonies, that he poured forth the song which bears his name! The authenticity of this composition is tolerably guaranteed by its transmission from Chronicle to Chronicle. It is composed in short strophes not rhymed but alliterated; each strophe commences with the refrain which likewise distinguished the war songs of the Franks; "We fought with the sword". It was by lay and song, Jornandes tells us, that his countrymen were wont to perpetuate their annals, and every true Goth learnt by heart those strains which could serve to inflame his courage in the hour of battle, or to add new joys to the banquet.

Minstrel skill indeed seems to have been highly prized among the nations of the North, and no wonder! It was their sole amusement when not engaged in fighting, drinking or hunting. Theodoric, as the highest mark of esteem he could offer, sent Clodowig, king of the Franks, a celebrated harp player. "We have chosen," he says, "a consummate master of his art who

---

(1) See the Krakumal, edited by Rtafn, Copenhagen.

will rejoice the glory of your power." (1) And the poet Fortunatus speaks of the songs which charmed the feasts of the Leudes and which, therefore, must have been in the Frankish dialect.

Eginhardt describes the lays collected by the orders of Charlemagne, and unfortunately lost to us, as "the most ancient barbarous poems celebrating the deeds and wars of the men of old" which proves how early such poetic traditions must have existed in Germany since, even in the ninth century, they were designated as "ancient".

But almost all have disappeared, less perhaps from the action of time, of perpetual emigration and internal conflict, than from the obstinate refusal of the monks, then the only scribes, to transmit to paper aught which tended to recall or perpetuate the rites and myths of Paganism, and the only relicts of ancient Teutonic poetry which survive in their primitive form are the Weissbrunnen Gebet or prayer, the Hildebrand Lied, Walter of Aquitaine and Beowulf.

Mighty changes had convulsed the world since the days of Ulphilas. Imperial Rome, long tottering beneath the weight of luxury, corruption and too extended empire, had sunk to rise no more. The sacrilegious touch of Alaric had for ever destroyed the still lingering prestige of Roman invincibility and Attila, even while he spared her, completed her humiliation. What a spectacle! the queen of nations, prostrate at the feet of a barbarian Calmuck, imploring, through the lips of her bishop, his mercy and

---

(1) Grégoire de Tours.

moderation! But a still more awful moment was at hand when even the mediation of St. Leo was to be of but little avail and the trembling Romans were to behold the fierce Genseric lead away, in triumph, the spoils of the capital of the world. All the savage nations of the north, Goths, Vandals and Huns poured like a deluge over Europe, till every vestige of Roman power and splendour was borne away by the overwhelming force of the torrent. Literature, poetry, arts and science, all seemed lost for ever. During the reign of Theodoric, indeed, they revived for a moment under the fostering care of his chosen friend and counsellor Cassiodorus; but the Lombard conquest destroyed their last trace. All the landmarks of civilization, all the glorious memorials of the proud days of Greece and Rome, were swept away by these sanguinary barbarians. The immortal works of the masters of antiquity were, for the most part, burnt or flung into the streams, and what remained were saved only by being buried in cloisters whence they were afterwards disinterred by the persevering efforts of a Boccaccio or a Petrarch. There were then no colleges, no professors, save those of Christianity, and it must not be forgotten that the fathers of the church, amid countless difficulties and dangers, not only preserved their intellectual superiority, but succeeded in preventing entire darkness from settling over Europe. They were not only Saints and Martyrs; they were likewise writers and orators whose genius and eloquence rendered them scarcely less the intellectual than the spiritual guides of those who listened to their voice.

The bishops, indeed, fill at this period one of the most useful and important parts ever assigned to man. They were the instructors, the lawgivers, the protectors of their flocks; the mediators between the conquerors and the conquered, the fathers spiritual and temporal of those committed to their care. The pretors might fly in terror, the generals themselves retreat before the advance of the invincible foe; but the bishop was bound by higher ties and sustained by a mightier power. *He* remained to save his people or to perish with them.

This high devotion, this lofty heroism produced, on the barbarian invaders, an effect little less than magical. The faith of Christ was not unknown to them; they speedily, the Franks more especially, became its ardent disciples and defenders. In Germany itself its progress was less rapid. Not that there were wanting earnest and pious missionaries to spread the glad tidings of salvation; but there were none who, like the early fathers of the church, distinguished themselves by their mental endowments; none, save Ulphilas, who have left any monument of their existence or exerted any great or permanent influence on the intellectual progress of their countrymen.

Centuries passed on, during which, all on the surface appeared gloom and confusion. But, beneath that seeming chaos, new and more vigorous elements of life and progress were struggling into being: the great deluge had fecundated while it destroyed, and the dark ages, distracted as they were by the conflict of opposing influences and hostile races, were still the seed time whence was to spring a glorious harvest

and bore, deep within, the germs of better and brighter days.

From the wide spreading ruin rose slowly, almost imperceptibly, all those noble institutions, those pure and elevating doctrines, which have opened to humanity a career so full of usefulness and prosperity. Ancient literature and ancient society had become equally corrupt; both needed renewing and invigorating, and it was only by contact and fusion with the rude nations of the north that this regeneration could be effected.

Yet, it was not on these nations that the returning dawn of civilization first shone. They remained, plunged in comparative barbarism, long after art and literature had begun to revive in more favored climes. That, under these circumstances, the Germans should have had a poetry of any description, however rude, when Provence had not yet a single minstrel and the north of France scarcely a dialect of its own (<sup>1</sup>), can be accounted for only by the advantage they had enjoyed, from the earliest ages, of a national language, split indeed into countless divisions, but still possessing in itself the principles of assimilation and unity which needed only time to develope. The Latin tongue which, with such skill and success, the Romans had transplanted over the greater part of their vast empire, which bade defiance to the inroads of the barbarians, in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, and, though corrupted and altered, remained, until late in the middle ages, the general language of the people at

---

(1) Hist. de la littérature du moyen âge, par Villemain, vol. 1st.  
p. 204, 209.

large in Gaul Spain and even Africa, never took firm root in German soil. In vain had the conquerors covered that portion of the land they had subdued with superb towns and stately fortresses, many of which, unscathed by time, still rise in solitary grandeur, memorials of their ancient rulers. In vain were the sons of the noblest families sent to the capital for their education. Rome, indeed, gained so many citizens the more, but without furthering, in the slightest degree, the aim she had in view. Nay, that immeasurable superiority in civilization, arts and literature, usually irresistible even in the vanquished, failed in overcoming the resolute nationality of the German race. The language of the conquerors existed, as it were, apart, confined to themselves, or at most to those among the vanquished who aped the habits and manners of their masters, but to the bulk of the people it never communicated itself in the slightest degree. In fact, though Trajan had reduced Dacia to a Roman province, though Adrian had established a line of fortresses from the Danube to the Rhine and raised a lofty wall from the tower of Pföring on the former river, to Millenburg on the latter, but a small portion of the vast territory of Germany was ever really subject to the sway of Rome.<sup>(1)</sup> The superb cities which rose beneath her magic touch, were, after all, mere military colonies, exercising but little influence on the population around. From the days when Hermann massacred the legions of Varus, the

---

(1) See Mémoires sur les Etablissements Romaines sur le Rhin et le Danube, par M. Ring. Strasbourg 1852.

Saxons had remained free. All those northern tribes which, later, poured their countless myriads, like hornets, over the fertile plains of Italy, were unknown to the conquerors of the Rhine and the Danube. Never had foot of foreign invader disturbed the solitude of the Harz Forests or the depths of the Bohemian woods, and the love of their native dialect had survived with the thirst for liberty and revenge.

Of the four poetic relics above mentioned two only can be properly included in the history of German literature, the Beowulf being in the Anglo-Saxon dialect and the Walter of Aquitaine in Latin; yet, as both evidently belong to the heroic legends of the ancient Teutonic races and are of German origin, we shall include them in our survey.

The Weissbrunnen Gebet and the Hildebrand Lied are rhymeless, but alliterated. In the most ancient German lays the poetic measure consisted, not in the quantity, as among the Greeks and Romans, but in the accentuation of the principal words in each line, and these words invariably commenced with the same consonants. This is termed Alliteration. (1)

This species of versification was common to the German as well as the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian poetry in the eighth century. At the beginning of the ninth it gives place to rhyme.

These lays are in the low German dialect, one of the four great branches into which the language had gradually divided itself, which, till the reign of Charles the Bald, was the idiom of the Frankish court and

---

(1) See „die beiden ältesten Gedichte des 8. Jahrhunderts,” von Grimm herausgegeben.

that of the German till the accession of the Hohenstaufen dynasty; the other three were the Alleman, the Suabian and the Bavarian.

There is nothing in the prayer deserving of notice, save its devout and humble spirit and the concluding adjuration against the power of demons. (<sup>1</sup>) But the Hildebrand Lied and the Walter of Aquitaine possess a far higher interest. They are a portion, probably a very small one, of the traditions to which we have already alluded, common alike to the whole Teutonic race which, after circulating orally for centuries and undergoing all sorts of mutations and modifications, were at length transcribed and arranged by the Scandanavians in their Sagas or chronicles and, by the Germans, in a variety of detached lays, probably those collected by Charlemagne. None that have come down to us, however, bear an earlier date than the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries when their scattered relics were remodelled and arranged by some unknown minstrels, lovers of the *olden times*, and divided into three separate works, the Heldenbuch, the Nibelungen and the Gudrune. Through most of these poems runs a connecting thread. The same personages appear more or less: Sigurd or Siegfried whose story and whose fate form the culminating point of this epic cycle; Etzel, king of the Huns; Dietrich of Bern or Theodoric the Great; Günther, sometimes king of the Franks, sometimes of Burgundy; Hagan his fierce and warlike vassal; Hildebrand vassal to Dietrich,

---

(<sup>1</sup>) Ueber den Ursprung der Sprachen. Grimm.

forming a series of cycles, all of which blend and unite in the "Nibelungen", as rivers mingle their waters in the ocean. But the "Gudrune" belongs to none of these; its home is Friedland and the islands of the Northern Seas and it may be regarded as a work apart from the rest.

The "Hildebrand-Lied", evidently a fragment of a much longer poem, may be considered as appertaining to the cycle of Theodoric the Great, or Dietrich of *Bern* or *Verona*, as he is called in poetry, from that town being his seat of government after he had subdued the empire of the West. In these northern traditions, however, the monarch becomes so invested with mythical attributes as to lose all historical identity. Being an Arian, he was condemned by the Church to eternal perdition. But the people, whose destinies he had so gloriously swayed, refused to believe in so stern a doom. Yet, not daring to question the decree, they took a middle course and consoled themselves by the assurance that the hero, whose memory they so loved and honoured, was not really dead; that he only slept and would return at some future day to reign over them and win Redemption by abjuring his errors.

According to some legends, Dietrich is the son of a spirit and his death as mysterious as his birth. When already far advanced in years but still active in mind and body, he was informed, one morning while bathing, that a superb stag was in sight. Throwing his robe around him, the monarch rushed forth, calling for horses and hounds; but impatient of delay and seeing a coal-black steed ready saddled

beside him, he set off on the chase. Swiftly fled the stag and swiftly followed the sable charger, so that one only of Dietrich's vassals could keep pace with him. "My Lord", he cried, "why ride you so fast, and when will you return?" "It is the Devil himself", replied Dietrich, "on which I am mounted, and I shall return only when God and the Virgin please".

Nothing, however, can be more confused than these traditions, or more utterly devoid of chronological accuracy. Thus in the lay before us, Theodoric has been banished from his kingdom by his uncle the fierce Hermanrich, King of the Goths, who was dead at least seventeen years before *he* was born, and takes refuge with Attila who departed this world when the Gothic prince was but eight years old. History itself consecrated this popular delusion in assigning a date to Theodoric's imaginary flight to the Huns, to his combat against the giants &c., of which we find some legendary details in the *Ecken Ausfahrt* and other fragments of ancient poems which have reached us.

The "Hildebrand-Lied" though rude and wild, is not without grandeur and dramatic effect. Hildebrand, companion in arms of Theodoric, has been banished with his master from Italy by Hermanrich, and has taken refuge with Attila in whose service he remains thirty years and then accompanies him in his last expedition against Italy, when he learns that the son he had left an infant is chief of the hostile bands. Distracted between hope and fear, he seeks this son. He finds him in the van of his troops and strives to

make himself known to him. He draws the golden bracelets from his arms to tempt him; but the hero replies such gifts must be received with the lance's point, and repulses him with indignation accusing him of falsehood.

I heard it told that in single fight  
 Hildebrand and Hudibrand summon'd each other.  
 Father and son prepared their arms,  
 Girt on their swords, and rode to the field.  
 Hildebrand spoke; he was the prouder,  
 Ay, and the wiser; he began to ask,  
 Tho' with few words, who was his father,  
 What was his name.

Hudibrand spoke; our people have told me,  
 The old and the wise, that my father's name  
 Was Hildebrand; I am called Hudibrand.

Hildebrand took from his arms the bracelets  
 And the rings the king of the Huns had given him:  
 These do I give thee as tokens of friendship.  
 Hudibrand spoke: — Hildebrand's son:  
 With the spear alone should such gifts be received  
 Point against point! thou art an old Hun,  
 A clever deceiver. With words thou wouldest tempt me.  
 Hildebrand spoke: I see by thine armour,  
 Thou hast at home a generous lord.  
 Oh Supreme God! what a fate is mine!  
 For sixty summers and winters I wander  
 Far from my home, and now my own child  
 With the sword would slay, with the axe would crush me.

Then father and son rush furiously against each other: here the lay breaks off leaving the issue uncertain. But another manuscript found in a Scandi-

navian collection and reproduced by Casper von der Rön, a minstrel of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, in his Heldenbuch, a collection of all the ancient lays then discovered, gives us the denouement of the story and informs us that Hudibrand, here called Alebrand, vanquished at length by his unknown father, listens to his assurances that he is indeed his sire; and that both return to Verona where they are met by Alebrand's mother. Beholding her son covered with blood she bursts into tears, but is quickly consoled when he informs her from whom he has received his wound and presents his victor. (1)

We owe the preservation of this relic to two monks of the convent of Fulda who amused their leisure by transcribing it on the blank leaf of a book of prayers.

In the Walter of Aquitaine we are introduced to the redoubtable sovereign who, alike in Scandinavian and German tradition, plays so important a part, though in the latter very little analogous to his real character, Etzel or Attila. This potent monarch, though according to the lay he has now, generally speaking, sheathed his terrible sword and spends the greater part of his time in feasting and revelry, is seized, one morning, with a return of his warlike propensities and sets off on an expedition against the nations who dwell on the banks of the Rhine.

The haughty monarch of the Huns Etzel, the mighty Lord,  
Resolved that all the earth should bow beneath his conquer-  
ing sword.

Already many a German realm did homage to his name;  
The mighty kingdom of the Franks to conquer was his aim.

---

(1) See "de Hildebrando, antiquissimi carminis teutonici frag-  
mentum" edited by Grimm. Göttingen 1830.

Giebig, king of the Franks, is engaged in celebrating the birth of his son Günther, when the rejoicings are rather unceremoniously interrupted by the appearance of the army of the Huns in the distance;

Beneath their horses' hoofs the earth trembled and shook with dread;  
The dust obscured the face of heaven; all who beheld it fled.  
and no wonder!

What is to be done? Resistance seems hopeless; so Giebig forthwith sends an ambassador with rich gifts and his nephew Hagan as hostage. Attila accepts the offering and turns his steps towards Burgundy; there reigns

Herric the rich and valiant and, smiling at his side,  
Was Hildegund' his only child, his darling and his pride.

Herric is as little inclined to defy the terrible Attila as Giebig and, his treasures not proving sufficiently ample to purchase his forbearance, he places in his hands his lovely child. So the monarch of the Huns leaving him at peace proceeds to pay a visit to the Aquitains. Here also prompt submission awaits him; Alfar, the sovereign of the land, follows the example of his brother kings and Attila departs bearing with him gold and gems and more precious still, as pledge of future obedience, Walter, Alfar's only son.

The fate of the captives, however, is less melancholy than might have been anticipated; for Etzel treats them with fatherly tenderness.

When once the noble Etzel had reached his native shore,  
He thought upon his hostages, whose hearts were troubled sore.  
For the young boys he cared himself, as for his flesh and blood;  
The maiden he commended to his queen so mild and good.

He did not leave the Princes a moment from his sight ;  
 Every art of peace he taught them, this was his great delight ;  
 And all that warriors should know.— They were his joy and pride ;  
 They soon could wield both sword and spear, and combat at his side.

When Etzel saw their daring, he preferred them to the rest ;  
 He chose them as the leaders of his bravest and his best.

. . . . .

And Heaven vouchsafed, in mercy, that the maiden young and fair  
 Should win queen Hilda's favour by her service and her care ;  
 For never was she wanting in obedience or in skill,  
 Forestalling all the queen's commands, fulfilling all her will.

With her keys queen Hilda trusted the mild and prudent maid ;  
 She ruled the royal household, and ne'er her trust betrayed ;  
 She did whate'er she listed, all bowed to her command ;  
 But still she pined for Liberty, for Home and Fatherland.

It happens however, in the course of time, that the King of the Franks dying, his son Günther refuses to pay the accustomed tribute to the Huns. A breach ensues and Hagan, feeling himself in consequence freed from all obligation, seizes the first opportunity to escape. Etzel fearful lest Walter, for whom he entertains no common affection, should follow his example, seeks to secure him by the offer of a lovely wife and a rich dowry.

Thou wert a tender stripling, when I brought thee to this land,  
 And thy first warlike lesson thou receivedst from my hand ;  
 Thou art now a stalwart warrior, my cares have not been vain ;  
 Thou hast won me many a subject land and many a foe hath slain.

In my service, gallant Walter, thou hast spared nor limb nor life ;  
 Thou hast borne thee as a Hero in many a bloody strife ;  
 And, now, I'll recompense the aid thy valiant arm affords,  
 And show my favour by a deed that's worth a thousand words.

Then choose thyself a lovely bride, the fairest thou can see;  
Though the richest in my kingdom, I will give her unto thee.  
Many a young and beauteous Princess among the Huns thou  
hast met,

Then tell me if thou hast not found one who has pleased thee yet.

But Walter, who still pines in secret for liberty and home, despite sixteen years of absence and has resolved to escape, rejects the proposal under pretext that his zeal in his Lord's service will not admit of his accepting any other yoke, even that of a fair wife. The king yields to this flattering argument and the matter drops; meanwhile, one of Etzel's many subject realms breaks forth into rebellion, and the young warrior, laying aside for the moment all ulterior projects, accompanies him to the field and lends him most efficient aid. The combat over and the foe vanquished, he returns to court. Entering the royal apartment, by a rare chance he finds Hildegunda to whom, as a boy, he had been affianced, pensive and alone;

Upon the maiden's lips he prest a tender kiss, the first.  
Give me a draught of wine, he cried, or I must die of thirst.  
Not long the maiden tarried, she loved the hero bold;  
She filled with rich and sparkling wine the cup of ruddy gold.

She gave it to the warrior; he crossed himself and drank;  
Then clasped in his the maiden's hand, her gentle zeal to thank.  
She did not draw her hand away; but fix'd on her his eye,  
Sir Walter drained the generous draught and laid the goblet by.

I was destined for thy husband; thou wert chosen for my bride:  
How often, lovely maiden, has the youth stood by thy side!  
And never has a single word those lips of coral passed,  
And never e'en a single glance thou hast deigned on him to cast.

But why deny each other, in this sad and foreign land,  
 The only consolation which we can yet command?  
 But she did not dare to trust him, that fair and timid maid,  
 Awhile she kept her peace and then looked full at him and said:

Thy tongue affects a language which is foreign to thy heart;  
 It is but bitter mockery, in which love has no part.  
 Young queens of radiant beauty thy hand and homage crave:  
 How canst thou think of Hildegund' the captive and the slave?

Then thus the prudent hero to the damsel made reply:  
 Nay speak to me without deceit, lay empty phrases by.  
 I have spoken to thee frankly, from my very heart, believe.  
 It is the truth, sweet maiden, Walter knows not to deceive.

Then at his feet the maiden sank and cried with trembling tone:  
 Command whate'er thou listest, I am thine and thine alone;  
 No power on earth shall hinder me thy bidding to fulfil;  
 For Hildegund' lives only to do her Walter's will.

This scene at once proves the antiquity of the poem, that it dates from a period when the institutions of chivalry, if they existed at all, were yet in their infancy; the submissive tenderness of Hildegunda and the authoritative tone of Walter strangely contrast with the humble devotion of a knight to his lady love!

From the ground the hero raised her and spoke: We feel the same;  
 My heart has oft revolted at a captive's galling shame.  
 Then tell me, wilt thou follow me? my bride I'll ne'er forsake.  
 She paused a while, then fondly gazed into his face and spake:

Yes, Walter, I will follow thee, it is my sole desire.  
 Teach me the way to freedom, thy words the wish inspire.  
 Whether success our efforts crown, or death attend our flight  
 I care not; I live but for thee, and death for thee were light.

Secure of Hildegunda's consent, Walter has now only to arrange with her the means of escape. His conduct in this conjuncture rather shocks our notions of morality, for he bids Hildegunda avail herself of the queen's unlimited confidence to fill two coffers with gold and precious gems and place them in readiness to bear away with them. — But when we remember that even this treasure formed but a small portion of that extorted by Etzel from Walter and Hildegunda's sires, and take into consideration the manners of the age, we shall scarcely be inclined to judge our Hero too severely. He then informs Hildegunda that he intends inviting the king and his court to a grand feast and, when the guests are heavy with wine, will steal from the apartment and, joining her in the court yard where she is to await him, commence their flight.

The day arrives, big with the lovers' fate!

The hall was hung with velvet, splendid as e'er was seen:  
Then royal Etzel entered, at his side Hilda his queen.  
With silver and with purple their lofty throne was bright;  
Beside them sat Sir Walter, that was the victor's right.

And full a hundred tables stood around the sumptuous hall  
They hardly gave the noble guests the time to empty all  
The dishes set before them, there were so many there;  
Wines too were not wanting, costly rich and rare.

At length the rage of hunger is appeased; the white table cloth, of which especial mention is made, is removed and the women steal away, a fact which proves that our present custom, so much reprobated, of the ladies retiring long before the gentlemen, has

at least great antiquity to plead in its defence. And now the guests commence those carousals which formed so important a part of their festivals, and Walter rising, presents the king with an enormous golden goblet and reminds him that any one who refuses to empty it is regarded by the Huns as a base recreant. King Etzel is not afraid of a full goblet; he drains it to the dregs and his example is followed by the assembled guests. Again and again is the huge cup filled to the brim and drained, till both the monarch and his heroes fall fast asleep. Then Walter steals silently from the hall, hastens to the court yard where he finds Hildegunda with two caskets, heavy with gold and jewels, by her side, repairs to the stables, selects the best steed, bridles, saddles it and leads it forth; then, arming himself from head to foot, he places the courser's bridle in the hands of his companion, and they commence their perilous flight;

Swiftly and silently they moved, while night around them lay;  
But when the ruddy streaks announced the near approach of day,  
If but a leaflet rustled, they thought the foe was near;  
The hum of bird and insect thrilled every nerve with fear.

They shunned the towns and hamlets, the cornfields and the lee,  
And sought the spot where never axe had fell'd the greenwood tree.  
O'er rough and pathless mountain roads, the noble pair must roam,  
Impell'd by hate of servitude, by love of friends and home.

The mid-day sun is streaming through the casement ere Etzel and his vassals wake from their deep slumbers. The king calls for Walter, but Walter is nowhere to be found and, while he is wondering what

has become of him, the queen's information that Hildegunda too is missing elucidates the mystery. Etzel, in fury, summons his vassals and bids them bring back the fugitives living or dead; but the young knight's prowess is so well known that not even the bravest will venture on the enterprise.

Thus Walter and his companion arrive in safety at the confines of Etzel's dominions, supporting themselves on the way with wild fruits and fish; for Walter has not forgot his hook and line. At length they reach the Rhine where a fisherman ferries them over and receives two fishes as his reward. These he carries to Worms where he sells them to the chief of the royal kitchen who serves them up at the monarch's dinner.

Günther, for it is he, has, it seems, considerable gastronomical acumen, for he at once discovers that these fish are not from the Rhine and, calling his cook, demands whence they came. On the cook's reply the fisherman is summoned and tells all he knows on the subject.

No sooner has Hagan, who is present, heard the tale, than he starts up exclaiming with delight it can be none save his boyhood's friend. But the intelligence produces a very different effect on Günther. On learning that, beside Hildegunda, Walter has with him two enormous caskets seemingly full of gold or jewels, he declares that he holds both maiden and treasure as his lawful prize, and will have them by fair means or foul. In vain does Hagan represent the turpitude of the deed and the danger of attacking so redoubtable a warrior. The King turns a deaf ear

to his remonstrances and sets forth with twelve of his bravest followers on his unhallowed purpose.

Sir Hagan rode beside them; not that he meant to fight: He sought to warn them rather; but they laughed at him outright: He wished too to behold, once more, his childhood's comrade dear; So these twelve rode all silent through the night so dark and drear.

Meanwhile Walter and his companion proceed on their way. On reaching a thick wood, in a deep and narrow glen, the youth, exhausted with fatigue, throws himself on the grass and, leaning his head on the lap of his beloved one, sinks into momentary forgetfulness. His slumbers, however, are soon broken by the approach of Günther's band which Hildegunda's terror exaggerates to a mighty host. Awaking her lover, she throws herself at his feet and implores him to plunge his sword in her bosom rather than let her fall into the hands of the Huns, as she imagines them to be. .

How! Stain my hands in thy dear blood, my own betrothed? No! How could this sword be mighty against this treacherous foe, If with its point my hand had dug my loved one's early tomb? Cease, cease this vain entreaty, and let us bide our doom.

He who 'mid so many perils, has afforded us his grace,  
Will guard us 'gainst the furious Huns; in Him my trust I place.

Then perceiving Hildegunda's error and recognizing Hagan, he bids her be of good cheer for, even if Günther does attack them, he has every chance of victory, the entrance to the glen being so narrow as to admit of one only passing at a time. Hagan, meanwhile, has prevailed on Günther to send a herald

offering Walter free passage if he will give up the treasures, but this he rejects with disdain, proposing, however, to pay a hundred *spangen* ('<sup>1</sup>) to pass unmolested. Günther will listen to no such terms and bids the attack commence. A fearful combat ensues, but Walter prevails. One after another his assailants fall beneath his arm. In vain does Hagan seek to keep, from the perilous strife, his beloved nephew *Patafred* who burns to try his virgin sword.

Whither goest thou, unhappy? 'Tis death awaits thee there.  
The gloomy Norne would kiss thee, — Beware, my child, beware!  
To measure thee with Walter is folly, vain and blind.  
But ambition urged the boy, he cast the warning to the wind.

How in her empty home will mourn thy young and tender bride!  
And the mother whom thou robbest of her only joy and pride,  
To whom no other child remains her lonely grief to cheer!  
Oh, madman! what can urge thee to rush on Walter's spear.

He said and, bathing him with tears, unto his bosom prest:  
Farewell, thou young and beautiful! his sobs drowned all the rest.  
In vain! His anguish could not move his nephew's gallant soul.  
From afar Sir Walter heard the grief Hagan could not control.

Walter himself, touched by the anguish of the companion of his childhood, endeavours to dissuade the youth, but to no effect and, like the rest, *Patafred* falls beneath his terrible sword. Soon none are left, save the king and Hagan. The former in despair reminds the warrior of the cruel death of his beloved nephew, and urges him to avenge it.

(<sup>1</sup>) Golden coins.

### Hagan

Did not speak; but in his heart in silence weighed once more,  
The faith and truth which in his youth to Walter oft he swore;  
But he thought likewise on his friends, and on his suffering Lord.  
And on his much loved nephew, who had fallen 'neath Walter's sword

King Günther saw him waver, he implored him and besought  
Until his supplications on his noble nature wrought.

And he promises him his aid.

The embrace he sees Günther bestow upon Hagan excites Walter's suspicions, and the sudden departure of the two warriors fills him with alarm. Exhausted with fatigue and want of food, he resolves, after much cogitation, on remaining where he is till morning; then kneeling down he prays.

Creator, lord of heaven and earth, who knowest and seest all,  
Without whose will and pleasure nought on earth can e'er befall.  
I thank thee, God and father! that thine all protecting arm  
From death and shame hath saved us amid the hostile swarm.

Now, Father, let my humble prayer thy gracious favor win;  
Thou pardonest the sinner, while punishing the sin.

Oh let me meet once more on high, crowned with eternal life,  
On the great day of judgement those I have slain in strife.

After this touching supplication, he entreats Hildegunda to hold watch while he snatches a few minutes' sleep.

And, after that, my watch and ward o'er thee I'll truly keep.  
She placed herself beside him, and he sank to slumber deep.

She kept her weary eyelids open with lay and song.  
The hero's tranquil slumber did not last over long:  
Then, from his grassy couch, he sprang with calm and hopeful breast,  
And bade king Herrik's lovely child lie down and take her rest.

Now, shining in the Eastern Heavens, beamed forth the morning star,  
The first grey tints of morn proclaimed the sun was not afar;  
The cool refreshing dew drops bathed both flower and tree  
and grass,

And the gallant youth prepared himself for what might come to pass.

Then rousing Hildegunda, he draws his sword and they proceed on their way; they have not long entered the open country, when they see two knights in complete armour spurring towards them. Walter recognizes Günther and Hagan; bidding Hildegunda retire to a neighbouring thicket and hold firm the bridle of their steed, he awaits the approach of his foes; When they are within hearing, however, he thus addresses Hagan;

Hagan, I fain would speak with thee ere we commence the fray.  
What is it, that has stolen thy former love away?  
What have I done to injure thee? how have I given thee pain?  
On thee I fixed my every hope and must those hopes prove vain?

I thought that thou wouldest hasten thy boyhood's friend to meet,  
That with a brother's fond embrace, the wanderer thou wouldest  
greet,

That thou wouldest offer him thy hearth, his weary limbs to rest,  
Then to his anxious father's court, would lead the welcome guest.

Remember all our childish sports, nought could our steps divide;  
How we shared our meals together and slumbered side by side,  
We never, never were apart; we wandered hand in hand;  
As friends, whom nought could sever, we were known throughout  
the land.

I forgot my home, my country, by thy fond love beguiled,  
My dear and anxious father, the duty of a child;  
How canst thou break the vow of truth, thou hast so often sworn?  
Beware, beware of perjury, nor laugh the gods to scorn.

Hagan replies by reminding him of his nephew's fate.

Thou hast broken me a blossom, most tender and most dear,  
Most precious to this aching heart, beneath thy cruel spear.

No reconciliation being possible, nothing remains but to try the fate of arms. A fearful combat ensues. Walter, despite the inequality of numbers, maintains the conflict for many hours. The sun is about to set and it is still undecided; when the three Champions having each received a severe wound, Walter having lost a hand, Hagan an eye, and Günther a foot, resolve at length to make peace. Hildegunda binds up their wounds, and they return as best they can to Worms, after exchanging, as they lie bleeding on the ground, a fire of jests rather extraordinary in their deplorable condition, but breathing of that fearless indomitable spirit which characterized their race.

This lay, of which the only manuscripts extant are in the Latin tongue, is claimed alike by the Germans and the Provencaux; the former attributing it to Eckard, monk of St. Gall who lived in 901, an assumption combated by Mr. Fauriel with great skill if not perfect success. At first sight, all the evidence appears in favor of the Germans. It was in Germany that the oldest manuscripts were discovered, one in the archives of a Bavarian convent, the other in the library of Carlsruhe: the first is not of greater antiquity than the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century, but the latter is proved uncontestedably to be of no later date than the end of the 9<sup>th</sup>.

In addition to this, we find Walter in more than one northern tradition. In the Nibelungen, the

Rosengarten and in the Scandinavian Wilkina Saga, that strange wild médley of history and fiction. (1)—

The tone of the poem too is thoroughly German; there is a simplicity, a heartiness, an absence of meretricious ornament which distinguish it from all the lays of Southern France that have come down to us. There are many little incidents which would argue an acquaintance with German habits and manners, somewhat extraordinary in a native of another land; the queen, for instance, intrusts her keys to Hildegundá as the strongest proof of confidence she can offer, a trait exclusively German and of which we never find mention save in productions of northern origin; the weapons on the shields are German, so are the names and characters of most of the personages. (2) On the other hand, Mr. Fauriel points out that in the oldest of the manuscripts occur certain barbarisms, both in terms and elocution, the latter of which are all such as would be made by one accustomed to write and think in the *Rustico Roman* or vulgar Latin of the middle ages; while, of the former, two only are of German source, the rest spring from some dialect, either of Gaul or Iberia, so that the author might be a Gallo Roman, a Spaniard or anything rather than a German. As a still more convincing, nay irrefragable proof, Mr. Fauriel cites the two manuscripts lately discovered in the libraries of Paris and Brussels, both of which, exactly similar to the

(1) See Grimm vol. 1st p. 89.

(2) Grimm's *Helden sagen*.

German, bear the name not of Eckhardt, but of Geraldus, a monk of the Abbey of Fleury on the banks of the Loire.

This evidence, however, cannot be admitted as decisive, since the date of the manuscript is wanting and, as Mr. Fauriel himself admits they do not appear to have been earlier than 960, at least a century later than that of Carlsruhe, their claim to originality may fairly be disputed.

A consideration of more importance is the improbability that the Germans who despised, or affected to despise, the conquered race, should have chosen a native of Aquitaine as their hero, nor can it be denied that the Christian piety and lofty courtesy of Walter are little in accordance with the fierce wild manners and habits of the Germans of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

In the Siegfried of the Nibelungen, indeed, they shine forth in equal perfection ; but the Nibelungen was completed in its present form only in the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the knightly virtues of the hero were probably grafted on the ruder picture of the original. Perhaps the difficulty may be adjusted by remembering that the Visigoths, having made themselves Lords of Aquitaine, assumed the name of Aquitaniens ; thus the author may be at once of German origin and southern birth, and the same remark may apply to the hero.

Of all the races of the north they were naturally the least savage and most readily acquired the tastes, habits and manners of civilized life.

In addition to France and Germany, Spain and Italy put forth their claims to this lay. In a chronicle

by the bishop of Posen, of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, is found the identical legend, though with sundry variations, and the monastery of Novalese, at the foot of the mount Cenis, possesses a manuscript written, about 1060, by an unknown monk who, among other poems, cites that of Walter of Aquitaine and gives an extract exactly similar to the lay possessed by the Germans. The chronicler mentions various tales relative to an ancient monk of the name of Walter who ended his days in that cloister and who, according to this tradition, was no other than the hero of the lay. "Formerly there lived in this convent", says the chronicle, "a monk of lofty stature, of great strength and a martial countenance; despite his grey hairs, he had wandered through the world, a pilgrim's staff in his hand, seeking a monastery the rude discipline of which might prepare him for the journey which must follow this mortal existence. After having vainly sought it for many years, it happened that he visited this spot, and resolved to settle here, but, in his extreme humility, he would accept only the employment of gardener which he solicited and obtained. This monk was sombre and eccentric; he never separated himself from his staff which hung, like a weapon, on the wall of his cell. When hostile bands ravaged the surrounding country, or robbers menaced the abbey, he would take it down from its nail, rush to attack them, with the permission of the abbot, and did terrible execution. Once he set to flight a whole army of bandits and the inhabitants of the Novalese still speak with admiration of the staff of Walter and its good blows. Beside him dwelt a young

monk of a gentle countenance who was said to be his grand son; both thought only of the things of a better world and their dearest occupation was to hollow out, in a rock, the sepulchre where they were to rest side by side." (1)

Beowulph belongs rather to the Anglo-Saxon than the Teutonic literature; the hero king of Jutland does not figure in any lays strictly German. Yet it is too evidently a portion of the vast cycle of northern tradition not to demand a brief notice. The scene passes on the shores of the Northern seas, where we find Beowulph brave, young and ardent, embarking for the neighbouring kingdom of Denmark to offer his aid in destroying a terrible giant, the scourge of the land. Welcomed with rapture by the king, he succeeds in forcing the monster to fly; but in the dead of night the inhabitants of the palace are roused from their slumbers by cries of anguish. The giant's mother, a sorceress cruel and ferocious as her son, has found her way into its halls and murdered Beowulph's dearest friends. Burning with rage, the hero flies to avenge them. He pursues the hag to the dismal swamps where she has fixed her abode and, after a fearful combat, both she and her son fall beneath his arm. (2)

---

(1) *Croniche Novalesi.* — *Attila et ses fils* par A. Thierry, V. 2.

(2) See *Beowulph* translated by Mr. Kemble.

## CHAPTER III.

### CYCLE OF THE NIBELUNGEN. — THE HORNY SIEGFRIED.

We have already been introduced to more than one of the principal personages who figure in these northern legends. — To Etzel, Dietrich and Hagan; let us now hasten to make the acquaintance of the remainder, above all of the noble and gallant Siegfried, the Achilles of the North as he has been termed, though really the parallel does not do him justice, at least if we regard him under his German aspect. True, there is more than one striking point of resemblance between the Greek and the warrior of the North. Both were endowed with superhuman beauty and superhuman strength. Both were invulnerable, save in one spot destined for the fatal blow; to both had been predicted a premature doom; both faced it with indomitable resolution.

But after all, Achilles is a mere pagan hero, fierce, cruel and revengeful and, save his devoted friendship to Patrocles which partakes of the violent passions inherent to his nature, we can scarcely discover a single noble or generous quality in him. The Sieg-

fried of the Nibelungen is a Christian and, to prowess not inferior to that of Achilles, he unites a loftiness of soul and above all a tenderness of heart inspired by a purer faith and the example of a suffering Redeemer. Were we to compare him to any of Homer's heroes, it would be to Hector who, though vanquished, is certainly far more noble minded and interesting than the bloodthirsty Greek.

The tradition of Siegfried is undoubtedly of very high antiquity. Whether it spring from German or Scandinavian soil is a question which, despite volumes of literary controversy, seems as far from solution as ever. Here we have no historical data to guide us, for Siegfried is a completely mythical personage. One argument indeed may be urged in favour of the German pretensions; in the Thidrikssaga collected, about the year 1230, from Saxon lays and legends we again meet with Siegfried with pretty much the same accompaniments as in the Edda. The question, therefore, is entirely one of date: but, as the exact era of the Thidrikssaga has not been ascertained, while the Edda is at least as ancient as the 8<sup>th</sup> century, we must admit the prior claim of the Scandinavians, till we have more conclusive evidence in favor of that of their rivals. (1)

But whether in Norwegian or Teutonic lays, Seigurd or Siegfried is evidently intended as the personification of manly virtue and prowess. According to the Edda he was the last descendant of the line of

---

(1) See Raazmann's „Deutsche Helden sagen und ihre Heimat“ full of learned and ingenious but by no means conclusive evidence.

Odin, an origin which would sufficiently account for his marvellous endowments. Of this divine lineage, however, no mention is made either in the Nibelungen or in another German lay, "the Horny Siegfried", the only one come down to us of which he is the sole hero, where his early adventures, his combat with the dragon, the rescue of Chriemhild etc. are recounted in detail, while the copious blending of the marvellous and the supernatural would tend to prove it of a date anterior to that of the Nibelungen. The language in which it is written belongs to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the versification is the same as that of the Nibelungen, viz; thirteen syllables. (1)

It thus commences.

"Once in the Netherlands there dwelt a king of power and fame  
A mighty and a warlike prince, and Siegberd was his name.  
His queen gave him an only child, a son both fair and strong.  
It is the story of his life I'll tell you in my song."

The boy is so tall and so headstrong that his parents know not what to do with him, for he refuses submission to their will and gives them unheard of trouble. They, at length, agree to let him follow his own roving propensities, trusting to the care of Providence.

Then the gallant boy departed and went upon his way;  
Deep in the mighty forest a little hamlet lay;

Here dwells a smith to whom, concealing his rank and name, he offers his services which are accepted.

(1) Billmar Geschichte deutscher Literatur. Vol. 1st. p. 119.

But he proves so unapt a scholar that the smith soon becomes tired of him and, on his venturing to chastise him, the boy gives master and servant so severe a correction, as to convince them that he is more than a match for them both together. To get rid of him for good and all, the vindictive smith sends him on some pretext to a spot where lies a brood of deadly dragons. But Siegfried is not disconcerted by such a trifles; cutting down a dozen trees or so, he hurls them at the monsters, sets fire to the heap and burns them to ashes. Then, perceiving a stream of glutinous substance issuing from the smouldering embers, he dips his finger into it. In an instant it becomes hard as horn and, availing himself of the hint, the young hero bathes in the precious fluid and thus renders himself invulnerable, save between his shoulders, where a linden leaf happens to lie. This is but the beginning of his adventures, though, according to some authors, it forms the whole of the early legend, the rest being of later date.

In the ancient City of Worms, upon the Rhine, reigns a king of the name of Giebig, the Günther of the Nibelungen, who has three sons and one lovely daughter.

The youthful princes were to reign over their father's land.  
One day at noon, their sister, fair Chriemhild, chanced to stand  
Beside the open casement. There came a dragon wild  
And in his horrid jaws he seized the fair and lovely child.

Up to the clouds, he winged his flight, far thro' the summer air.  
The father and the mother stood and gazed in mute despair,  
He bore the trembling maiden unto a rock so high,  
That half a mile o'er hill and glen its darksome shadows lie.

If, this is, as tradition avers, "The castled Crag of Drachenfels", it has somewhat diminished in height since those days.

The maiden in her beauty well pleased the dragon grim,  
For food and drink and costly cheer, she wanted nought with him.

Which the old poet seems to think ought to console  
her a little for her captivity.

On that lonely rock he kept her for many a dismal year.  
She never saw a human face, nor spoke to human ear.

Once a year however, on Easter day, the dragon assumes a human form, and Chriemhild seizes the opportunity to attempt to soften his heart.

Then spoke the ravenous monster to the maiden pure and bright:  
Thy father and thy mother never more shall glad thy sight;  
No creature upon earth, fair maid, thine eye shall ever see;  
But, both with soul and body, thou shalt down to Hell with me.

These last fearful words are explained by the intimation, we receive a few pages later, that the dragon is condemned to eternal perdition. He has been changed from a Giant of extraordinary beauty into a dragon by the curse of a woman he has deceived, a dispensation which, could it be awarded whenever it is due, would probably be more efficacious in preserving morality than all the homilies in the world. If our modern Don Juans had to choose between fidelity and the hideous form of a dragon, might not virtue itself become fashionable?

At the end of a certain period, however, the monster is to be restored to human form, if ere its expiration,

he can contrive to find a bride; a condition which sufficiently accounts for his anxiety to retain his prize.

Yet, fear not, gentle maiden; I will not bring thee shame;  
Of thy life I will not rob thee nor of thy virgin fame.  
'Tis only five short years to wait ere I my form resume,  
And then, sweet, thou shall be my wife in all thy youthful bloom.

This is poor consolation to Chriemhild, to whom, in whatever shape he might appear, her ravisher would probably be equally hideous. But help is nearer than she imagines. While following the chase one bright spring morning, Siegfried suddenly finds himself at the foot of the very rocks on whose summit Chriemhild sits enthralled, the dragon at her side. At the sight of the terrible monster (the maiden he does not perceive) even Siegfried's stout heart quails for a moment and he is about to quit the spot when,

Amid the tall and gloomy pines he sees a form appear,  
A dwarf, and Engel was his name. His steed was black as night.  
His garb it was of satin sheen with ruddy gold bedight.

This is the first and only time we hear of one of the race of German elves on horseback. Like their English brethren, their only coursers were the "gnat and summer fly". In this respect the fairies of the Highlands were far in advance of them, for Mac Culloch tells us of a mountaineer who, one night, heard the tramp of horses and beheld thirteen fairy hunters sweeping by, their silver bridles jingling in the night breeze. But we must return to Engel.

The dwarf the Hero greeted, in mild and courteous mood,  
And ask'd what chance had brought him into this gloomy wood.

He then urges him to retreat with all speed and shun the dragon, which Siegfried is quite ready to do; but when he adds that, at his side, sits the fairest maid in Christendom, the Hero draws his sword and swears to rescue her or perish! This vow so terrifies poor little Eugel that he turns to fly; but Siegfried holds him fast and, on his resistance, the warrior whose forte is not patience seizes him by the hair,

"And dashed him against the rocky cliff with such a mighty shock  
That the rich crown fell from his brow in fragments from the rock.

This unanswerable argument silences all Eugel's scruples. He at once offers to conduct the hero to the giant Cuperan who can alone unlock the magic rock, for this rock, being too steep for mortal footsteps, is accessible only by an interior staircase. But he warns Siegfried that he will have to fight for her,

As never mortal man hath fought, for dread the dragons ire!  
To fight, quoth gallant Siegfried, is all that I desire.

And indeed his heart leaps at the very thought. So presently they stand before the giant's abode. Siegfried who always tries gentle measures to commence with, requests him to come forth and commune with him. But Cuperan, deaf to the voice of courtesy, replies only by fierce invectives and, rushing forward with an enormous staff of iron, he aims a fearful blow at his unwelcome visitor; the latter skilfully evades it and inflicts on his assailant so terrible a wound that he flies howling to his den, to emerge however, armed with battleaxe and brand, to renew the combat. But these avail little against the

dauntless soul and iron hand of Siegfried and, at length vanquished and prostrate, the giant sue<sup>s</sup> for mercy which is granted on his promising his aid in the deliverance of Chriemhild; but as the generous Siegfried follows him to the cave (after binding up his wounds with his own silken scarf), the traitor turns suddenly upon him and fells him to the ground. Help however is at hand. Covering the hero with his magic cap, the noble little Eugel renders him invisible and thus gives him time to recover his senses, while the giant, amazed and furious, fills the air with howls and curses. No sooner does Siegfried open his eyes, than despite, the dwarf's entreaties, he throws aside the protecting cap and renews the combat with so much vigour that in a few moments his foe lies disarmed and prostrate at his feet, when his repeated declarations that it is by his aid alone that the captive maiden can be rescued, arrests the impending blow. This time the monster has received too terrible a lesson to venture on a second act of treachery, at least for the moment; so he guides his victor truly to the rock, places the magic key in the door, it springs open and in a few moments they reach,

The crag so drear and bare;  
Then the gallant Siegfried beheld the maiden fair;  
She lifted up her voice and wept, and sobbing with delight,  
Cried: I have already seen thee, thou brave and noble knight!  
Yes, thou art the noble Siegfried; thou art thrice welcome here;  
Tell me, at Worms, upon the Rhine, how speed my parents dear?  
And both my noble brothers whom I loved so much of yore?  
Now, by thy truth, oh let me hear those cherished names once more.

Then thus the noble Siegfried: peace, lovely virgin, peace;  
Thou shalt with me, I promise thee; then let thy weeping cease  
Sweet maid, ere long I'll bear thee from this den so dark and drear,  
Or else, by all I love on earth, I swear to perish here.

The conversation is interrupted by the giant who, availing himself of Siegfried's preoccupation, seizes the magic sword concealed amid the rocks and inflicts a deep wound on the unsuspecting hero. But Siegfried undismayed rushes on him, hurls him to the ground and, deaf to all his supplications, severs his head from his body. By this time, however, the warrior who has not tasted food for *six days*, begins to be somewhat exhausted, and the consequences might have been serious but for the aid of the faithful Eugel at whose nod some half dozen dwarfs suddenly appear bearing a table ready spread with a rich repast.

Scarcely has he snatched a hasty morsel when he hears a crash which sounds as though the very rocks were crumbling to their base.

At the sound the lovely maiden trembled in every pore,  
And cried: thou noble Siegfried! all, all alas! is o'er.

Then spoke the gallant hero: and who shall take the life,  
Which God in mercy has bestowed? I do not dread the strife;  
Thou must not tremble, sweetest, while I am by thy side.  
The dwarfs, who had served at table, had dispersed far and wide.

At the same moment flames of fire and awful howls announce the near approach of the dragon. Boundless is the monster's rage on discovering that she, on whom his future destiny depends, is about to be borne from him and, it must be confessed, that

to find one's self condemned, when on the very point of casting off one's scaly attire and resuming human form, to wear out existence as a bachelor dragon instead of the husband of a lovely maiden, must be peculiarly trying. But Siegfried could not be expected to sympathize in these feelings. Sword in hand, he rushes on the grim foe who breathes forth fire and flame from his horrible jaws. To escape the intolerable heat, Siegfried retreats for an instant into a deep cleft of the rock which affords some protection from the fire. Here lie concealed the treasures which Eugel's father had collected from the depths of the earth and had been forced to surrender to the dragon; but Siegfried has no time for such contemplation. No sooner has he somewhat recovered, than he rushes forth once more and, after a fearful struggle, pierces the scaly monster to the heart. Chriemhild's ecstasy may be conceived and, with a chaste kiss, she seals the promise of her heart and hand.

The royal dwarf king Eugel to the gallant Siegfried spoke:  
The dragon and his giants had bowed us to their yoke.  
More than a thousand noble dwarfs were subject to their sway;  
We were forced to yield to them our wealth and all their will obey.

But now thou hast redeemed us and we once more are free;  
With all our hearts we offer our services to thee.  
I'll guide ye on your homeward way, if that ye so incline;  
I know full well each step and stone to Worms, upon the Rhine.

And off they set, bearing with them the treasures which Eugel's ministering dwarfs have laid upon the backs of mules, awaiting his orders. On their way Siegfried requests Eugel who, like all supernatural

being's is supposed to have the gift of second sight, to read him his future destiny. Eugel at first refuses, but at length informs the hero that he has but eight years to live; that he will then perish by the hand of traitors; that his beauteous wife will avenge him and fall in the strife. Siegfried listens undismayed; then bidding farewell to his little companion, whose guidance he no longer needs, continues his journey. Nevertheless as his career is to be so short, he resolves not to carry away the treasure lest it should cause contention among his heirs and, on reaching the Rhine, he flings it into the stream. This account, as we shall see hereafter, differs widely from that in the Nibelungen Lied.

Arrived at Worms, Siegfried is received with regal honors and his marriage with Chriemhild celebrated with unparalleled splendour. The fated eight years have not yet elapsed, when the grim Hagan, Günther's fiercest warrior, Gernot his brother, and others jealous of Siegfried's glory, determine on destroying him and, seizing the opportunity while he is reposing beside a brook, stab him in the only spot where he is vulnerable. (')

This poem has many passages of great tenderness and beauty, and the rhythm is far from deficient in melody. The old poets handled these verses of 13 syllables with as much ease as their warriors the two handed swords with which they did such terrible execution in the battle field.

---

(<sup>1</sup>) *Lied des gehörnten Siegfried.* Frankfort 1580.

In this lay the Nibelungen are described as dwarfs vanquished by giants, while, in the Nibelungen, they are themselves giants with subject dwarfs at their command. We shall see presently how long Worms preserved the recollection of this wild legend, almost contemporary with the superb cathedral which yet towers in solemn grandeur in that city, once the seat of imperial pride and splendour, now lonely and almost deserted. Although the above is the only German poem we possess, save the Nibelungen and the Rosengarten, of which Siegfried is the hero, various legends, referring apparently to his exploits under other designations, still linger among the inhabitants of some parts of Germany and have been collected by the brothers Grimm, in their "Haus und Kinder-Märchen" to which we refer our readers.

Dragons as we see, play a very important part in German traditions, and, indeed, in those of all Christendom in the middle ages. Perhaps some dim reminiscence of the monsters of the antediluvian world, whose petrified remains were so calculated to impress ignorant and superstitious minds with awe and terror, may account for the belief in these hideous beings, once almost universal in every land.

---

## CHAPTER IV.

THE NIBELUNGEN. — THE ATILA OF ROMANCE AND OF HISTORY.

THE Nibelungen to which the preceding poem forms as it were, a prologue, has been so frequently reviewed, criticised and translated that any further observations may appear superfluous; yet we cannot pass, without a brief notice, a poem which occupies a place so important in German literature and which, in grandeur of design, if not in beauty of execution, so far surpasses any other poetical production of the same period. It opens with an animated description of the grace and beauty of Chriemhild, which are expatiated on in many a high-sounding stanza.

Chriemhild has three brothers; Günther the king of Burgundy, Giseler and Gernot “the Child” whose gentle and amiable character is dwelt on with complacency in various parts of the lay. Chriemhild has forsaken marriage in consequence of a dream. But this resolve, as is usual in similar cases, is soon to change. The gallant Siegfried has heard tell of her surpassing beauty and determines to woo and wed her for his bride. Despite the warning of his father

who has some dark presentiment of ill, he rides without escort or attendance to the ancient city of Worms, to seek the fair sister of its king. He meets with a courteous welcome and vanquishes all the knights of Burgundy who venture into the lists against him. But although Chriemhild has witnessed the tournament from behind the grated window, he is not permitted to behold her charms. For a whole twelve-month does he remain at the court of king Günther without once seeing the hem of her garment. Nevertheless, though he has never beheld her, Chriemhild, with maiden curiosity, has contrived to catch a glimpse of him and his manly beauty has already won her heart. At length a war breaks out. Siegfried offers his services, which being accepted, he marches with a thousand men against the foe who musters forty times that number and speedily returns triumphant, bringing with him the kings of Denmark and Saxony as captives. He is now permitted to see Chriemhild and even to salute her, but not yet to lead her home as bride. By this time though the passion which the mere fame of her beauty had kindled, is raised to the highest pitch by the sight of her surpassing loveliness, he begins to despair of ever winning her as his own.

In his own mind he thought: how could I ever deem  
To win thee as my own; 'tis but an idle dream,  
Yet rather would I die, sweet maid, than leave thee now.  
And pale became his cheek, and gloom sat on his brow.

Chriemhild, on her part, is not insensible to the noble bearing of the youthful hero, and many a stolen glance of love do they cast on each other. Meantime tidings arrive at Worms of a beauteous virgin called

Brunhild, queen of Isenland; of her matchless strength and courage, and how every suitor for her hand was forced to abide three combats and, if vanquished, was condemned to a cruel death. Günther resolves to try his fortune and, despite all the arguments of friends and followers, to win her or perish. Siegfried agrees to accompany him and aid him in his enterprise on condition that, if successful, the hand of Chriemhild shall be his reward. The terms settled, the heroes seek the fair Chriemhild to ask her aid in providing themselves fitting apparel to appear before the queen of Isenland. Chriemhild willingly undertakes the pleasing task and herself cuts out the snow-white silk enriched with precious stones, the gorgeous velvet sown with pearls and the other splendid materials of knightly and royal attire in those times. After a voyage of twelve days and various adventures, they arrive at their destination. Siegfried presents himself as ambassador to the proud queen and, to increase her sense of Günther's power, represents himself as his vassal, a falsehood which is the primary cause of all subsequent calamities. The lists are opened and Brunhild appears in gorgeous armour, bearing a shield of beaten gold so heavy that four of her chamberlains can with difficulty support the weight. The poor king begins to feel rather uncomfortable when he is startled by a light touch on his shoulder though he can see no one, and a well-known voice bids him yield himself up without resistance to his unseen interlocutor and all will go well. In fact, seizing Günthers arm, Siegfried, invisible by the aid of the magic cap,

fruit of his victories, hurls the spear, flings the stone and surpasses the martial maid, in every feat of arms till, at length, confessing herself fairly vanquished, she bids her vassals do homage to Günther, her supposed conqueror, as their lord. Günther's sensations during the whole business could not have been very enviable and, when the gallant Siegfried taking him up in his arms, fairly leaps with him through the air, even his delight at his approaching triumph can scarcely have prevented his feeling himself in rather a ridiculous position.

The contest over, Siegfried doffs the magic cap and, with an air of infinite simplicity, inquires "when the games are to begin?"

Günther, however, not quite confiding in the apparently amicable sentiments of his intended bride and entertaining some fears lest she may, in an unguarded hour, assault and murder him and his followers, Siegfried proceeds forthwith to his own domain and brings back, in an incredibly short period, a thousand warriors. Thus protected, Günther who informs the queen that they are his own vassals (for lying goes for nothing in these romantic poems), prevails on her to leave Isenland and they all hasten back to Worms, where they are received with the utmost splendour by Chriemhild, her brothers and her mother. Chriemhild, in particular, welcomes her future sister-in-law with the warmest assurance of affection and respect:

The maidens fair embraced each other o'er and o'er;  
Sure such a warm reception was never seen before  
As that with which the ladies now the royal bride did greet;  
Dame Ulta and her daughter, how they kissed those lips so sweet!

Tournaments and other martial games follow and Siegfried reminding Günther of his promise, the fair Chriemhild is summoned and her concurrence asked. After a little maidenly hesitation she blushes a soft consent. The enraptured Siegfried once again salutes her lovely lips and the double union is celebrated amid the utmost pomp and rejoicing.

Brunhild, however, though she has submitted to her own lot with most commendable resignation, is indignant at her sister-in-law wedding a vassal. Günther tries to pacify her by assurances that Siegfried in his own country is a mighty prince; but this does not satisfy her and he dares not undeceive her, lest the discovery of this deception lead her to suspect others. The proud queen determines to punish her husband for his contumely and, when they retire to rest, ties him hand and foot with her girdle and hangs him up to a nail in the wall, where she leaves him till morning to his own reflections. Next day there is a magnificent tournament; but the king's brow is gloomy and his heart sad. Siegfried, suspecting the cause, promises his aid in depriving the haughty princess of the girdle, source of all her magic strength, and accomplishes the feat (of course invisibly) with perfect success. But in a luckless hour, he presents Chriemhild with the girdle and confides the whole tale to her ear, at the same time enjoining the strictest secrecy. For the present no mischief results and, after some days further rejoicing, Siegfried and his bride depart for the dominions of Siegmund, Siegfried's father. There they remain for ten years during which Chriemhild becomes the mother of a

lovely boy. At length Brunhild, whose pride is hurt by Siegfried's failing to present himself at her husband's court as she deems him in duty bound to do, prevails on Günther to invite him and Chriemhild to a high festival at Worms. They come magnificently attended and are most warmly received. For some days all is harmony and good-will; but at length one morning, as the queens are sitting together watching the martial sports in which the heroes are engaged, a contention arises as to the relative merits of their lords. The dispute grows warm and, at length, Brunhild contemptuously reminds her sister-in-law that Siegfried, after all, is only Günther's vassal. Chriemhild indignantly denies the assertion and, on their proceeding shortly afterward to mass, strives to enter the church before the Burgundian queen. This Brunhild fiercely resists, declaring no vassal's wife shall ever take precedence of a crowned queen. Chriemhild, fired at the taunt, retorts by an epithet the most opprobrious that can be applied to a woman and above all to a wife and rushes into the Cathedral, leaving Brunhild overwhelmed with shame and fury.

After mass, the justly enraged queen demands of Chriemhild a proof of her base insinuation. Chriemhild still carried away by pride and passion, produces the fatal girdle, a token which, if found in the possession of any save the lawful husband, was regarded as an almost irrefutable proof of guilt among the nations of the north. Günther is summoned. On learning what has occurred, the unlucky monarch calls for Siegfried and indignantly demands how he dared utter so foul a lie? Siegfried, strong in his

consciousness of innocence solemnly denies the charge, sealing the denial with an oath which Günther and most of his followers, well knowing the hero's true and loyal nature, at once believe. Günther seeks to appease his wife and the strife appears ended. But Brunhild, as may be supposed, is not so easily appeased. She vows revenge and the fierce Hagan, Günther's most devoted follower, probably the Hagan of the "Walter of Aquitaine", who has always hated and envied Siegfried, promises to insure her the means.

The king reluctantly consenting, the plan is speedily arranged. A report is spread that war has broken out in Saxony and the generous Siegfried offers his aid, despite the fond entreaties and dark forebodings of Chriemhild who sincerely repents, though too late, her criminal burst of passion. The subtle Hagan presenting himself before her under the pretext of a farewell visit, she is induced, by her very terrors for Siegfried's safety, to confide to him the spot where, as we know, the hero alone is mortal and implores him to protect her husband there; thus a second time, though from a very different motive, betraying the secret intrusted to her. Hagan promises and Siegfried, after bidding his wife a most fond and tender farewell, departs. We must not omit, however, to give an idea of the manners of the times, that he had previously beaten her black and blue, as a punishment for her conduct towards her sister-in-law; but this is evidently regarded as a perfectly legitimate mode of discipline, not in the slightest degree detracting from the merits or affection of the husband, or calculated in any way to diminish the tenderness

of the wife: and, in this light, Chriemhild herself appears to have regarded it.

The war is deferred and a royal chase is substituted where the murder is to be accomplished. After the hunt, a foot-race is proposed to a rill at some distance, whither the wine has been carried under pretence of cooling it. Siegfried, throwing off his armour, starts with the rest. He arrives first, and while he lies down to drink, Hagan plunges a lance between his shoulders. The hero, though mortally wounded, starts up and seeks his weapons, but in vain. Hagan has removed them from his side. Sinking down exhausted he expires, with his last breath recommending his wife to the mercy of her brothers and protesting his innocence of the lie attributed to him and which, he well knows, is the cause of his murder.

This is one of the most touching episodes of the poem. Regardless of his own sufferings, of his own doom, the dying hero thinks only of those cherished beings he is about to leave behind. Never, surely, was the depth and truth of real love more finely illustrated than in the words the expiring warrior addresses to his weak and pusillanimous brother-in-law, words full, not of reproaches at the treachery of which he is the victim, but of entreaties that Günther will at least protect his wife and child, and he expires with their name on his lips.

Ever feeble and vacillating, Günther now bitterly deplores the crime of which he has been the accomplice; but Hagan glories in the deed and, to crown his vengeance, lays the bleeding corpse at Chriemhild's chamber-door. Her horror and despair at the sight

may be imagined. Siegfried's father who has accompanied him to Günther's court, is summoned and vows instant revenge, but is dissuaded by his daughter-in-law who, well knowing the number and valour of her brother's warriors, fears lest he too should perish.

After the first wild burst of grief is over, Chriemhild follows her husband's funeral surrounded by her friends and attendants, all overwhelmed with sorrow, all burning with revenge. On entering the Cathedral, the mournful procession is met by Günther and Hagan, the former of whom, approaching his weeping sister, attempts to persuade her of his own innocence and of his sympathy with her distress. Chriemhild indignantly placing herself beside the open coffin, bids those who know themselves guiltless of her husband's blood approach and touch the corpse. Hagan advances with an air of haughty indifference, when lo! the blood gushes forth in torrents and proclaims him the murderer.

When all is over and Chriemhild somewhat calmer, Siegmund earnestly entreats her to return with him to the Netherlands, promising her all love, honor and protection. But she is prevailed on, by the supplication of her mother and younger brother, to remain with them; a most extraordinary resolution considering that her only child had been left at Siegmund's court.

Time rolls on. Chriemhild, though treated with all due consideration, remains inconsolable, refusing for four years even to see her brother Günther. At length, however, she is persuaded to admit him into her presence and a reconciliation ensues amid many tears; but to Hagan she resolutely refuses forgiveness.

Meanwhile new troubles arise. Chriemhild has been prevailed on to send for the Nibelungen treasure, her husband's wedding gift. But her lavish generosity so excites the suspicions of Hagan, that he induces Günther to tear the treasure from her and he himself buries it deep in the Rhine, swearing never to confide the spot where it reposes to human ear. This outrage puts the finishing stroke to Chriemhild's resentment and she eagerly awaits the hour of revenge.

After thirteen years Etzel, king of the Huns, seeks the hand of the still lovely widow, though she must now have attained the ripe age of forty three. At first she rejects his suit with horror; but yielding to the bait thrown out to her by his ambassador Rüdiger, the gallant Marquis of Austria, that all her wrongs shall be avenged, she yields an unwilling consent. Followed by a numerous cortege, she leaves the land where she has suffered injuries so deadly and, on her arriving at Etzel's court, the marriage is celebrated with all due splendour.

Seven years pass by; but Chriemhild, though apparently happy as a wife and mother, still cherishes an undying regret for the husband of her youth and thirsts for revenge on his murderers.

At length, having matured her plans, she prevails on Etzel, from whom however she keeps them a profound secret, to invite Günther, Brunhild and the flower of their nobility to a grand festival. The invitation is accepted despite Hagan's forebodings.

Chriemhild welcomes her brother Giseler with a tender embrace, the rest with cold disdain and Hagan with a glance of fierce anger which is increased

by the taunts and insults with which the ferocious warrior presumes to assail her, even amid her courtiers and followers. This day, however, passes by in peace. Next morning, the kings are to attend mass together and it appears there is some intention of assassinating Günther and his followers during the holy ceremony; but on seeing them in complete armour, the idea is abandoned.

After mass a tournament is given in honour of the guests. Hagan, perceiving in the lists a Hun splendidly arrayed, finds a savage pleasure in rushing on him and piercing him through with his lance. This foul act rouses the indignation of all present and, had it not been for the interference of the king, a general engagement would have ensued.

Peace is once more restored, but is soon broken. For, on Chriemhild's and Etzel's son Ortlied being presented by his father with the most gracious words to the assembled guests, Hagan replies by an insult which rouses even Attila's tardy ire. A murderous conflict ensues. Thousands are slain on both sides. Hagan to crown his other ruthless deeds, strikes off young Ortlied's head as he sits on the lap of his mother who remains to urge on her followers to vengeance. Despite the inequality of numbers, the success of the Huns appearing more than doubtful, Chriemhild commands the hall to be set on fire. But even this does not avail her. Her bravest warriors fall before her eyes and the Burgundians, though almost annihilated, still keep a host of enemies at bay. Etzel himself, however, does not even draw a sword and is altogether so tame and inoffensive a

personage, that it is difficult to identify him with that terrible Attila whose name has continued a byeword to all succeeding ages. A “bon homme” justly observes Mons. Ampère, “to this has popular tradition transformed the curse of God.”

At length Dietrich of Berne who has hitherto kept aloof from the combat, yields to the queen’s supplications and leads his men against the few remaining Burgundians all of whom are destroyed, save Günther and Hagan.

These, after a desperate resistance, he leads bound and bleeding to the feet of Chriemhild who offers Hagan his life on condition of the instant surrender of the treasure. A contemptuous refusal is the only reply. Chriemhild, frantic with rage, commands the instant execution of her unhappy brother. Hagan still refusing to surrender the treasure, she, with Siegfried’s sword, severs his head from his body. Hildebrand one of Dietrich’s followers (evidently the stout old warrior of the Hildebrand’s lay), horrified at the sight, plunges his sword in Chriemhild’s bosom. She falls and Etzel, Dietrich and Hildebrand alone remain to mourn the dead.

Such is an imperfect outline of this ancient and extraordinary poem which, despite all its horrors and improbabilities, has many passages of touching beauty and wonderful power. The action extends over a long period of years. Ten elapse between Siegfried’s marriage and his reappearance at Günther’s court; thirteen more between his death and Chriemhild’s second marriage and seven more between that event and the final catastrophe; making in all a period of

thirty years. Siegfried, the hero, is one of the most charming characters of romance or poetry either ancient or modern. He unites all the daring courage of the warrior with the milder virtues of the man, and is evidently the beau ideal of a perfect knight in those wild days of adventure. His generous self-devotion and singleness of heart command our regard and admiration, while his cruel and unmerited doom awakens our deepest sympathy. Chriemhild is, at first, all the poet's fancy could frame of loveliness and worth in woman and he dwells with delight on her exquisite beauty and gentle virtues; till, in a moment of unbridled passion, the result of wounded vanity, she betrays the secret intrusted to her care and becomes the involuntary destroyer of the husband she adores and ultimately the avenging fury who, with her own hands, can take a fellow creature's life in cold blood and command the execution of that brother whom she once so tenderly loved. Brunhild's character is well sustained throughout, nor does it ever vary. Proud and haughty, stern and vindictive, though not incapable of softer emotions, we yet feel, as soon as we read the insult of which she is the victim, that it could not fail to rouse all the darker passions of her soul and, in the words of a modern poet who has chosen this episode as the theme of a tragedy of no common beauty, we are sensible that every word

"That does not breathe of vengeance and of blood,  
Is vain and empty." (1)

---

(1) Raupach's "Nibelungen treasure". London, Williams & Nor-gate 1848.

Hagan, the instrument of her revenge, appears at first sight a ruthless implacable murderer whose restless cruelty is ever in search of new victims; yet, on closer examination, we shall find that strangely blended with all his fiercer qualities, nay perhaps at the very source of all, are loyalty and devotion to his king, a devotion which banishes every other feeling whether of pity, honour or remorse.

Such a character, however guilty, cannot fail to command some degree of respect, especially when judged by the standard of the age to which he belonged; for we must remember that, among the wild fierce nations of the north, loyalty was regarded as the one great virtue, while pity, charity and all the milder qualities of heart and mind were looked on with contempt and indifference. The influence of Christianity, although just beginning to pierce the gloom, was not yet sufficiently potent to soften the nature of these savage races.

At first sight, the fierce Hagan of the Nibelungen resembles but little the bold but kindhearted warrior who weeps with anguish over the nephew he is about to lose; but there are traits in the lay which remind us of the hero of "Walter of Aquitaine", ere time and the stern trade of war had hardened his nature.

The real home of those traditions from which the Nibelungen lay takes its rise, has been and still is, we have already seen, the subject of warm discussion. At first sight, the claim of the Scandinavians as urged by the historians of their literature, Mr. and Mrs. Howitt, appears indisputable. In the Edda we

find the materials of the German lay. In the Brunhilda, the Gudrune and the Sigurd, we behold, in grander proportions and more gigantic outlines, all the personages of the Nibelungen. On the other hand, it is not impossible that the same poetic traditions may have existed among the Germans at as early a period; that it is from these and not from the Sagas of the North that the Nibelungen itself was evolved, and that the two are but different versions of the same tradition. In both the Edda and the Nibelungen, the hero kills a dragon and renders himself invulnerable; in the one case by roasting and eating his heart, in the other by the still less agreeable process of bathing in his blood; in both he makes himself master of a treasure which is to bring a malediction on its possessor: but in the Nibelungen this event, and indeed the whole mythological portion of the story, is thrown very much into the back ground, while in the Edda it occupies the most prominent place. In both we find the personage of Brunhild; but in the Nibelungen she is a mere mortal woman, endowed with supernatural strength: in the Edda she is a Valkyre or secondary divinity, appointed to watch over and decide the fate of battles and plunged into a magic sleep by Odin, as a punishment for having defeated and killed a monarch to whom he had promised victory. Sigurd, defying the flames which surround her dwelling, breaks the spell, loves and is beloved and it is only through the unholy charms of Griemhild, the mother of Jykes, king of Burgundy, whose court he visits after leaving Brunhild, that he forgets her and weds Gudrune, the Chriem-

hild of the Nibelungen lay. Gudrune has three brothers and her husband, in perfect oblivion of the past, woos and wins Brunhild for Günther, one of them, by assuming his form, nor is it, till too late, that he perceives his error, while Brunhild who at once recognizes, in the husband of Gudrune, the hero who had won her virgin heart, can scarcely conceal her anguish. Still, all goes on quietly till one unlucky day while the queens are bathing together (a far more primitive proceeding than going to mass and which goes far to prove the superior antiquity of the Edda over the Nibelungen), Gudrune wades further into the stream than her sister-in-law and thus puts the finishing stroke to the hatred and jealousy which have long consumed her. A quarrel ensues; Gudrune accuses Brunhild of having yielded up her honor to Siegfried and, as a proof, produces a ring he had taken from her finger and foolishly presented his wife. Maddened by love and jealousy, Brunhild induces her husband to murder Siegfried and then, unable to survive him, destroys herself, like an Indian widow, upon his corpse. Gudrune's agony, embittered by self reproach, is deep and terrible, but lulled to oblivion by a magic draught from the hand of her mother, she weds Atli, king of Hunland, supposed to be Attila, but not as in the Nibelungen to seek the means of punishing her brethren from whom she has accepted "*Busse*" or atonement and whom, therefore, she is bound equally by law and custom to forgive. It is Attila and not his wife who invites the Burgundians to his court in order to obtain possession of the Nibelungen treasure, and it is to revenge their

death that Gudrune murders her children and her lord.

This conclusion to the tragedy tallies far more with facts than that of the Nibelungen. On his return from his last expedition against Rome A. D. 453, Attila, as history informs us, tired, it would seem, of his sixty wives and concubines, espoused a beautiful girl called Hildigo, though he had not long before slain her father and her brother. The nuptials were celebrated with great splendour. But the next morning, as all remained silent in the bridal chamber, the guards alarmed burst open the door and found the conqueror dead, bathed in his blood, while his bride sat beside him wrapt in her long veil and shedding tears. The Goths spread the report that their monarch had died from the breaking of a blood vessel, but the poet Saxo who wrote at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, relates the story as given above and laments that the greatest of warriors should have fallen by the hand of a woman.

Throughout the Edda runs a far more ferocious and savage vein than through the Nibelungen. True, there is barbarism enough in the German lay; but it is tempered, in some degree, by the mild spirit of christianity. The Edda is completely pagan. Fearful as is the conclusion to the Nibelungen, it is pale and colourless compared with the passage in the Edda where Attila bids the heart of the living Hogni, or Hagan, be torn from his bosom, and that scene still more awful where Gudrune, more cruel than Medea, first murders her children as they cling

fondly to her arms and then serves up their hearts to their father at a royal banquet!

In the Nibelungen Chriemhild is slain by the indignant Hildebrand on the body of her slaughtered brother, while of Brunhild we hear no further mention. In the Edda, on the contrary, Brunhild kills herself that she may follow to the tomb him she has so madly loved, even while destroying him, and Gudrune, the Chriemhild of the German lay, having wreaked her vengeance on Attli, throws herself into the sea in the hope of ending her wretched existence, but is carried by the waves to the realm of King Jonakur who makes her his wife<sup>(1)</sup>. She bears him three sons and brings them up with her daughter Svanhild, sole issue of her marriage with Sigurd, of whom there is no previous mention. Svanhild is, like her mother, the loveliest of her sex, and the fame of her beauty reaching the ears of Jormunrek or Erminreks, monarch of the Ostrogoths, he sends his son Randvor as his ambassador to demand her hand.

It is granted, and the young prince leads her back as his father's bride; but meanwhile Jormunrek's favourite counsellor Bikki whispers, in his master's ear, foul charges against the unhappy youth, accusing him of having seduced her who was entrusted to his guardian care. The king lends but too willing credence to the tale, orders his son to be put to death and Svanhild, whom he deems his accomplice, to be trodden under foot by wild horses. Gudrune, on learning the fate of her daughter, the only being for

---

(1) Völs. Saga. p. 39.

whom, since Siegfried's death, her frozen heart has ever gushed forth with natural love or tenderness, "who sat in her hall, like a mildly beaming star", breaks forth in wild lamentations, "for the bright locks of Svanhild dragged beneath the horses' hoofs", and urges her sons to instant revenge. They set forth on their desperate mission; but on the road a quarrel arising with their younger brother, they murder him; a deed which brings a curse upon their enterprise. Pursuing their way, however, they surprise Jonakur seated at the banquet, rush upon him, seize him and cut off his hands and feet; but ere they can despatch him, they are themselves surrounded and slain by his enraged followers.

Here, amid much that is merely legendary, we find shadowed forth a real historical event. Jornandes tells us that Erminrek, King of the Ostrogoths, to avenge himself on his faithless counsellor, ordered the wife of the guilty man, Sanielth, to be torn to pieces by wild horses; (1) an act of ruthless cruelty quite in accordance with the savage energetic nature of the "grim king with wolfish soul" as the Anglo-Saxon Scald Deor terms him. Sanielth's brothers, burning with revenge, surprised the murderer and wounded him so severely, that although he did not die on the spot, he expired not very long after, a victim to bodily suffering and mental anguish, at finding himself unable to repel the invasion of the Huns. (2)

(1) Jornandes. *De rebus Geticis.* L. 31.

(2) Muratori. *Annali istorici.* Vol. 1st. p. 253.

A deep moral lesson, not the less striking because implied rather than expressed, pervades both the Scandinavian and the German lay. At the root of all the calamities which overtake the fated race of the Nibelungen, lies the lust for gold. Wealth, indeed, appears to have been held in no less estimation by the ancient inhabitants of the north, than by their Norman and Anglo-Saxon descendants.

We continually hear of the “rich king”, the “rich queen” as the most exalted appellations that can be applied to man or woman. How far the terrible chastisement that visits the sin in the lay before us, has been successful in warning succeeding generations in any land, is more than problematic.

So far as, amid the perpetually recurring anachronisms of all descriptions, it is possible to trace the events recorded in the lay to an historical data, they appear to belong to the middle of the fifth century.

The fearful contest between the Burgundians and the Huns is probably a reflex of that which really took place A. D. 450, when the Burgundian Monarch and his whole family were massacred by the ruthless invaders.

Professor Müller discovered the name of Gieseler, Günther's brother, in an old copy of the Burgundian laws of that era.

Isenland he conceives to be Iceland which was discovered by the bold Northmen about the beginning of the ninth century and which its wild and savage scenery, its icy rocks, and subterranean fires, invested with a certain degree of awe and mystery.— It seems indeed a fitting home for the fierce and haughty Brunhild.

Though Siegfried himself is generally regarded as a mythical personage, yet his fate is probably founded on that of the prince of the same name assassinated by Clodowig in the chase, blended perhaps with the history of the Austrasian king who fell a victim to the treachery of Hilperic or rather of the detestable Fredegonde; for such is the utter confusion of dates which pervades all these old traditions, that an anachronism of a couple of centuries or so, is not regarded as of the slightest importance. The Siegbert of history, though far inferior in knightly virtue and prowess to the Siegfried of the lay, was a bold generous and successful warrior. Contrary to the habits of the Frank sovereigns in general and the other sons of Clother in particular, he contented himself with a single wife, the celebrated Brunhild daughter to Athanagild, King of the Goths, established in Spain, who, in her beauty and her pride, bears no small resemblance to the queen of Isenland and to whom he preserved an inviolable fidelity till his tragic and premature end.

A comparison has been often instituted between the Nibelungen and the great epic of Greece. The infinite superiority of the latter in artistic skill, in sustained loftiness of tone and in most of the essentials of beauty needs no comment. As well compare the rude pagan idol of Irmengill, discovered by Charlemagne in the forests of Saxony, to the Apollo of Belvedere! What is it then which invests this poem with so great an attraction? It is the startling fidelity with which the human heart is pourtrayed, the bursts of genuine enthusiasm and rude passion which bear

us onward, as on a rapid torrent, despite the minuteness and inordinate length of the details.

Nay, even these are not without their utility; they allow of our growing familiar with all the *dramatis personæ* and of our entering into their thoughts, feelings and peculiarities, till we learn to regard them as familiar friends, to sympathize in their sufferings and to rejoice in their success.

To attempt to place the Nibelungen on a par with the Iliad, as is frequently attempted by the Germans, is simply absurd; yet we doubt if any of Homer's warriors, even Hector himself, inspires us with such mingled pity and admiration as the gallant Siegfried.

In many respects the ancient lays of the north bear a greater affinity to the Indian than to the Grecian epics, particularly to the Ramayana and the Mahabârata already mentioned. This observation may perhaps apply less to the Nibelungen than to the Edda which, like the Hindoo poems, embodies a religious and philosophical system, while the German "Lied" is merely the history of a race, its sufferings and its fall. Still here too, there are sufficient points of resemblance to suggest the possibility that a vague echo of these grand traditions, surviving the lapse of ages, may have been borne to the icy regions of the North by the Asiatic tribes in the course of their migrations, and thence transplanted to German soil. The adventures of the noble Rama, the hero of the Ramayana, his love for the fair Sita whom, after prodigies of valour, he delivers from a cruel ravisher, recall the adventures of Siegfried. In the Mahabârata, the subject of which is the struggle between two

royal dynasties, occurs more than one scene which reminds us of the Nibelungen, particularly the massacre of the army of the blind king Dhiterachtra by the triumphant sons of Pandou.

Whether the Nibelungen be a series of lays composed at different periods and merely collected and arranged by some Rhapsodist of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, or whether it be the work of one individual, has been the source of as much controversy as the unities of Homer himself.

The brothers Schlegel, no mean authority, held the latter opinion, on the ground of the consistency maintained in the delineation of the *dramatis personæ* particularly in that of Chriemhild, Hagan and Günther. But there is nothing extraordinary in the fact that personages, celebrated in national traditions handed down from generation to generation, should invariably preserve the same attributes, and the compiler, whoever he might be, had only to assemble and organize the scattered lays, to give the whole an air of symmetry which all its anachronisms cannot succeed in destroying.

That the individual, however, to whom we owe the Nibelungen in its present form, was himself a master of his art, is evident from the skill with which, out of so many heterogeneous elements, he has contrived to mould a grand and tolerably harmonious whole.

The oldest manuscript of the Nibelungen extant is dated A. D. 1290. Into such profound oblivion had it fallen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that we find no mention of it, save in a work now almost forgotten, by an Austrian writer, on the "emigration of nations".

In the year 1757 professor Bodmar, to whom the German language is so deeply indebted, found two manuscripts on a shelf of an old library, in the castle of Ems, where he was wont to spend many a studious hour and, on unrolling one of them, discovered his new found treasure to be no other than the Nibelungen Lied, of the very existence of which a faint echo only had reached him. With his accustomed industry, he forthwith set about the not very easy task of deciphering it and published the second part under the title of "Chriemhild's revenge". We shall not attempt to enumerate all the editions and translations which have since appeared, or the innumerable commentaries to which they have given rise, but refer our readers to the voluminous and learned histories of German literature by Gervinus, Vilmar and others. Never was tradition more devoutly believed than that of Siegfried. Long did Worms boast of its palace of the giants and, down to the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the supposed grave of the giant killer was the resort of thousands of admiring pilgrims.

The "Klage" which may be regarded, in some degree, in the light of an appendix to the Nibelungen, differs in many respects from that poem. In a species of epilogue, we are told that the author, or rather compiler, is a certain Pilgren, Bishop of Passau a real personage who lived in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and that it was composed for "the love of his nephew dear". (1)

This nephew is no other than the Margrave Rüdiger who plays so important a part in the latter

---

(1) *Der Klage.* — Vers 4538.

pages of the "Nibelungen", though, in fact, he did not live till the ninth century and who was distinguished for his courage and chivalric virtues. He was governor of the Duchy of Austria, where he died A. D. 991. To the Bishop himself we have been already introduced in the "Nibelungen" (verse 50187) when he receives the queen and the *cortège* of Huns who conduct her to Etzel's court. He was mixed up in all the most important affairs of Germany and, during the twenty years of his episcopacy, played a principal part in the conversion of the Huns. In the "Klage," no mention, whatever, is made of the seizure of Chriemhild's treasures which, in the "Nibelungen", is represented as calling down the vengeance that falls on the heads of the Burgundians. There is no allusion to any of Siegfried's earlier exploits, or to the destruction of the dragon. In the "Nibelungen," the poem concludes with the death of the queen; of Attila we hear no further mention. But the "Klage," though it does not give us any very satisfactory information on this point, at least honours the Hunnic Sovereign with a few words' notice, though only to the effect that his end is enveloped in mystery.

How it went with Etzel then,  
How he managed with his men  
When Sir Dietrich rode away,  
That I really cannot say.

If into the abyss he fell,  
If the devil bore him into hell,  
Or what else his fate might be;  
No one hath reveal'd to me.

(Klage, verse 4622).

The discrepancy between the Attila of Scandinavian and Latin tradition and the Attila of the "Nibelungen" and, indeed, of all the German legends in which he plays a part, is very striking. While the former, exaggerating the ferocity of the King of the Huns, represent him as an absolute monster of crime and cruelty, the curse of God, the destroyer of the human race; the latter adorn him with almost every manly virtue, — wisdom, hospitality and integrity. He is terrible indeed, but to his foes alone and in open combat, easily moved to pity and susceptible of the tenderest and warmest affections. Instead of innumerable wives and concubines, he contents himself with one legitimate spouse who, in "Walter of Aquitaine", reigns supreme over his heart and household, while in the "Nibelungen" he is represented as deeply deplored her loss, for which he seeks to console himself by demanding the hand of the Burgundian Princess. No mention is made of his numerous harem, or his sixty sons.

In short though not a Christian, Attila has every Christian virtue, and even shows a strong inclination to be converted; for his wife and chosen friends are Christians. His disinterestedness is not inferior to his other qualities; for, when Chriemhild insists upon carrying away her treasures, or at least what remains of them, in which purpose she is insolently opposed by Hagan, Rüdiger begs her to leave them, adding that Attila neither wants nor desires them, that he wishes to endow her himself and will cover her with more gems than she can wear. Nor is his hospitality less eminent. He hails, with unsuspecting delight, the treacherous

proposal of his wife to invite her relatives to his court, declaring that his joy in receiving them would equal hers; nor is it till roused to fury by the murder of his child, that he consents to attack them.

At first sight, it is not very easy to account for the incongruity between these portraits; for the inhabitants of the banks of the Rhine and the Danube, then forming part of the Roman empire, were scarcely less cruelly visited by the hordes of Attila than the plains of Gaul and Italy. Gregory of Tours tells us that the Huns fell upon this part of Germany, like hosts of devouring locusts, destroying all before them. Still, as the territories devastated were principally Roman colonies, the horror and indignation excited by their fate did not make an impression so deep or so universal as might have been expected. Many of the German tribes, the Goths and Ostrogoths in particular, subsequently took part in the destruction of the western empire and, in their vindictive satisfaction at the humiliation of that power which had so long bowed them beneath its yoke, they forgot and forgave all they had suffered from Attila, more especially as their subjection to his authority ended with his life.

History has left us a sufficiently accurate portrait of the King of the Huns, to allow of our testing the truth of the different descriptions given us in these legends.

"Attila", says Jornandes, "was short of stature and large chested; his eyes small and deeply buried in his head; his beard thin, his nose flat, his complexion almost black. His neck was naturally thrown back

and the keen rapid glances he cast around him gave something haughty and imperious to his physiognomy. He was evidently marked by the hand of destiny as a man born to terrify nations and shake the earth. If anything irritated him, his eyes flashed fire, the most resolute dared not confront his anger. His words and actions were impressed with a sort of emphasis calculated for effect. He never threatened but in the most terrible language. When he conquered, it was to destroy; when he killed, to leave thousands of corpses without sepulchre; but at the same time he showed himself gracious to those who submitted to his power, accessible to supplication, liberal towards his servants and just to his subjects."

"He was extremely simple, but of great cleanliness in his attire. His food consisted of the plainest dishes without seasoning; in all things his frugal habits contrasted with the splendour he loved to see around him. To the irascibility of the Kalmuck, he united his brutal instincts; he drank freely, frequently to intoxication. He had innumerable wives and his children formed almost a nation." (1)

Certain similarities between Walter of Aquitaine and the Nibelungen Lay, lead to the conclusion that the existence of the former was not unknown to the author or compiler of the latter. Both make mention of a kingdom on the Rhine and its capital Worms, though in the one case the monarch is called Günther, in the other Giebig. In the Nibelungen we find certain allusions to the adventures recounted of

---

(1) Jornandes, *De rebus Geticis*, A. D. 552.

Hagan in Walter of Aquitaine. When on the arrival of the Burgundians at the court of Etzel, Chriemhild sends four hundred warriors to destroy Hagan, one of them observes that nothing shall induce them to attack him.

I knew him well in boyhood, his post I've seen him keep  
 In twenty bloody battles, which made many a woman weep.  
 Walter and he were noted for their courage and their pride,  
 In the days they pass'd together here, fighting by Etzel's side.

And again, Attila observing Hagan, struck by his fierce and haughty air, demands his name. On learning it, he replies that he knows him well; that he and Walter were his hostages, that he had sent Hagan home and that Walter had fled with Hildegund.

Though Etzel appears as one of the most prominent figures in so many ancient Teutonic lays, but one has reached us bearing his name. It is called "Etzel's Hofhaltung" or court, and gives an animated description of the power, the pomp and, above all, the hospitable virtues of the Hunnic sovereign. It thus commences:

A king of power and fame  
 Sat on the Hunnic throne;  
 King Etzel was his name;  
 His like was never known.

In virtue and in wealth  
 No other can we find;  
 Twelve kings bore crown and buckler  
 This mighty lord behind.

He gave these kings their freedom  
 Tho' subject to his sway,  
 And likewise to twelve noble dukes  
 Who did his rule obey.

To many a gallant noble,  
 To men of lowly birth,  
 The king was mild as he was great.  
 Like him was none on earth.

King Arthur too was wealthy  
 And at the self same time;  
 But he was ne'er like Etzel  
 E'en in his golden prime.

None ever dared assail him;  
 It would have cost his life.  
 The monarch held high festival,  
 There was no sound of strife.

Etzel has sent an invitation to all the neighbouring princes to visit his court bringing with them their wives and children, while his queen has collected around her all the poor of the district, so the hall is crowded with guests of high and low degree. "Never", says the poet in a burst of admiring enthusiasm, "was there a spectacle of royal bounty and domestic bliss so charming, as that presented by Etzel and his queen."

All at once, the banquet is interrupted by the appearance of a maiden of surpassing beauty, who throwing herself at Etzel's feet, implores his mighty aid in restoring her to her hereditary domains, whence

she has been expelled by a cruel foe. Etzel assures her of his warmest sympathy, but, true to the pacific part assigned him in all Teutonic lays, refers her for more efficient aid to his friend and vassal Rüdiger. Rüdiger accepts the task, but fails in the attempt, and it is accomplished by Dietrich of Berne who is sojourning at the court of the Hunnic sovereign. (1)

---

(1) The M. S. of this old poem is in the Vatican. It was edited by von der Hagan in 1847.

---

## CHAPTER V.

## GUDRUNE.

LET us now turn to the Gudrune which, though inferior perhaps in power to the Nibelungen, infinitely surpasses it in grace and tenderness. It belongs, apparently, to the same era and, as it has remained till now, we believe, pretty nearly unknown to English readers, we may venture on a more detailed survey than that we have bestowed on its sister poem. The subject is drawn from one of the Sagas of the North, though its exact source cannot be ascertained. Seldom do we meet with a fairer or more touching creation of poetic fancy than Gudrune, and those who have the patience (for some patience it certainly does require) to accompany her through all her varied adventures, will acknowledge that, amid much that is commonplace, tedious and unartistic, there is a depth and tenderness of feeling, a truth and warmth of colouring which render the poem attractive even in an age so far removed in habit, manners, and customs from that in which the events recorded are supposed to have taken place.

The first of the *dramatis personae* to whom we are introduced is Siegbert, King of Ireland, then the chosen resort of what little science or literature still survived in Europe. From Ireland came that Clement whom Charlemagne held in such high esteem.

It was Ireland that sent to the court of Charles the Bald that John Scott Erigen who was regarded by the Gauls as the greatest of earthly philosophers. It is not therefore very surprising that this land should have been chosen, as the theme of song. Siegbert's only son Hagan when scarcely seven years old, in the midst of a splendid tournament given in celebration of his birthday, is seized and carried away by a vulture. In his struggles, however, he contrives to loose himself from her hold and, falling to the ground, of course without injury, conceals himself amid the brushwood and thus escapes her piercing ken. After wandering about awhile, he meets three princesses transported thither by robbers and perceiving a bow and arrow lying near him, he seizes them and pierces the vulture, who is again hovering above him, to the heart. He then leads his fair companions to the sea shore where a pirate's bark, cast there in a storm, is waiting as if to receive them. Hagan who, considering his tender years, is certainly the most extraordinary of all the heroes of romance or poetry, pushes off the bark from the shore and steers it safely to Ireland where, as may be supposed, he is rapturously welcomed by his distracted parents.

From such a childhood what might not be anticipated? Hagan's maturer years do not belie the promise of his youth. Ere yet the down has ripened

on his chin, the fame of his exploits has resounded from shore to shore. His father resigns his crown into his hands and he weds Hilda, the loveliest of the princesses he has saved. A daughter is borne to them who receives her mother's name and inherits more than her mother's beauty. Princes and kings seek her hand; but her father deems none worthy of her surpassing loveliness. At length Hettel, King of Jutland and Friedland, despairing of winning her by fair means, resorts to stratagem. He sends a vessel, freighted with costly merchandise and commanded by two devoted vassals, to the coast of Ireland. There the two chiefs disembark and, presenting themselves before Hagan, entreat his pity, as exiles persecuted by an ungrateful master. Touched by their calamities or won by their offerings, Hagan promises them protection and accepts their invitation to visit their vessel with his wife and daughter; but scarcely has the princess who precedes her royal parents ascended the side, when the ship weighs anchor, and rapidly disappears. Furious at the trick of which he is victim, the king sets sail with a mighty army to avenge the outrage; but the tears and entreaties of Hilda who soon pardons the deceit in consideration of the love which had inspired it, succeed in effecting a reconciliation. Thus ends the first part which has little reference to the rest of the poem. The carrying off of the royal boy, the despair of his parents, their delight when he is restored are delineated with great truth and spirit.

The second part commences with an animated description of the bliss enjoyed by Hettel and his fair wife.

True, his tranquillity is occasionally broken by the attacks of jealous neighbours; but he quickly repels them and these little diversions serve to preserve him from ennui. Two children bless the royal union, a boy called Ortwein and a daughter of surpassing beauty, the fair Gudrune. So soon as the latter is of marriageable age, all the neighbouring princes, fortunate enough to be single, hasten to proffer their suit; but they are rejected by her haughty father. Among the most distinguished of the royal lovers are Siegfried, King of Moorland; Hartmuth, King of Norway and Herwig, lord of Heligoland.

Siegfried is the first to offer his homage; but though Gudrune is not disinclined towards him, her father will not hear of the alliance; so he departs vowing revenge, and gives place to Hartmuth who previous to presenting himself, despatches a solemn embassy to demand the hand of the fair Gudrune.

It seems that the prince or his father, with whom he shares the royal prerogative, hold a portion of their territories in fief to old King Hagan, Queen Hilda's father; so Hettel rejects his suit with something more than his usual haughtiness. But Hartmuth is as proud as Hettel and is not to be so easily foiled. Before taking any decisive step, however, he repairs, disguised as a knight errant, to the court of that monarch to see if the prize be worth the cost.

The knight was fair and manly, noble in face and form,  
Courageous, true and daring, with heart both mild and warm;  
He hath beheld the maiden he fain would win as bride,  
And many stolen glances have passed on either side.

He let her know, in secret, who he was and whence he came,  
That he was lord of Norway, and Hartmuth was his name.  
She made reply, his presence in that court was all in vain,  
Though gladly had the noble maid beheld his face again.

The fair one did not hate him; perchance he touched her heart,  
Although her sire had bade in scorn his messengers depart.  
She whom his heart so coveted, although her lips were mute!  
Yet had the duteous maid resolved never to grant his suit.

Sadly he turned him to depart that young and noble guest;  
But with a weight of anxious care his bosom was oppressed.  
How he might wreak his vengeance upon King Hettel's pride,  
And yet not lose the heart of her he hoped to win as bride.

Despite the innumerable pretenders to her hand,  
Gudrune bids fair to end her days in single blessedness, when a new suitor, whose territories adjoin those of Hettel, makes his appearance, the youthful Herwig.

Rejected like the rest, the prince, carried away by rage and grief, summons his vassals, and invades King Hettel's territories; but his troops are dispersed and broken, and he himself is about to perish beneath the sword of the indignant Hettel, when Gudrune, who from the battlements has been spectatress of the fight, raising her voice amid the tumult, implores her father to stay his arm. Hettel who has learnt to appreciate the courage of his assailant and thinks perhaps that, after all, a son-in-law so valiant is not to be despised, not only spares his life, but permits him to renew his suit and as Gudrune, heartily glad to put an end to the interminable feuds of which she is the involuntary cause, declares her willingness to become his

bride, matters are speedily settled to the satisfaction of all parties.

Herwig's triumph soon reaches the ear of Siegfried; for though there were neither newspapers, post-offices nor electric telegraphs, above the earth or under the sea in those days, at least that we know of, the old proverb "bad news travels fast" was no less true than now, and the King of Moorland avenges himself by invading his rival's territories and ravaging them with fire and sword. Roused from his dream of bliss by these unpleasant tidings, Herwig returns forthwith to his dominions to chase the invader, accompanied by his father-in-law and all the flower of his chivalry. The good Hettel in the pride of conscious power, forgets that he leaves his own kingdom nearly defenceless, and Hartmuth who has, it seems, his spies at Hettel's court, is too wise to lose so good an opportunity of winning the long-sought prize. Remembering the soft looks of Gudrune and believing perhaps that, like her mother, she will easily forget his amorous violence, he and his father set sail with twenty thousand men for Fried-land and, after endeavouring once more by conciliatory means and promises to attain their end, but in vain, they storm the castle, slay its defenders and force their way to the very apartment where Gudrune and her mother have taken refuge.

Then the gallant Hartmuth approached the noble maid;  
You still have scorned my loving suit, fair dame, he proudly said.  
But now our turn has come at last and in this very hall;  
I and my friends are victors and might kill you one and all.

In a few hours, the weeping Gudrune has been torn from the arms of her distracted mother and, with her maidens, is borne off in triumph to the vessels of the conqueror.

Unspeakable is the anguish of Herwig and Hettel, when in the midst of the success which has crowned their arms, they learn this unexpected calamity. By the advice of old Wate, Hettel's stern but devoted vassal, terms are proposed to Siegfried who not only accepts them, but offers his aid in punishing the ravisher, a trait perfectly in accordance with that mixture of ferocity and magnanimity which characterized the age.

But how are ships to be procured? Wate who is never at a loss for an expedient and is not to be restrained by any idle scruples of conscience, solves the difficulty by seizing the vessels of a band of pilgrims just landed on the coast, and further presses some hundreds of their best men into the royal service. But an action so sacrilegious brings its own punishment and we learn that Hettel and his land,

Perchance paid dearly for the wrong they did this pilgrim band.

For the moment, however, nothing is thought of but speedy vengeance; so Hettel and his son-in-law set sail in pursuit of the robber and his prey. They overtake them towards evening where they have cast anchor for a while near a little island, and a fearful conflict commences. But the pilgrims' curse is upon Hettel and his army. The king himself is slain and the enemy, under cover of the night, set sail with their prize.

Deep indeed is the agony of the almost broken hearted Hilda when, instead of her daughter, the lifeless body of her husband is laid before her feet.

Alas! what grief is like my grief! exclaimed the monarch's wife; Both, both! must be torn from me, first my heart and then my life.

All hope indeed for the moment is over, for the losses sustained by Hettel's army in their late conflict, have so reduced their numbers that old Wate declares many years must elapse ere they can attack Hartmuth with the faintest chance of success.

Nothing is left but patience. Queen Hilda hastens to repair the injury inflicted on the pilgrims, and retires to her palace to weep in silence and solitude, while Herwig, sad and sorrowful, returns to his own land to prepare new forces for some more propitious hour. It certainly does seem rather extraordinary, considering Hettel's pride and power, that a single unsuccessful combat, however murderous, should have so completely annihilated his forces. But the poet tells us that so it is, and we are bound to believe it without further question.

Meanwhile the ravishers and their captive near the shores of Norway.

As Ludwig saw his castle high towering o'er the strand,  
Thus to the sad Gudruna spoke the lord of Norman land:  
Seest thou those castles, princess? now cast thy gloom away,  
If thou wilt show us favour, all these shall own thy sway.

Then thus replied the homeless one o'erwhelmed with bitterest woe:  
To whom shall I show favour, or what have I to show?  
From hope and gladness severed, in anguish deep and sore  
My lot in life is sorrow; joy, I can know no more.

Out spake the brave old Ludwig : let your grief be thrown aside,  
 And list to Hartmuth's wooing, of warriors the pride.  
 All that we have, fair princess, to you we'll gladly give  
 So that in love and honour, with Hartmuth you will live.

Cease, cease these vain entreaties, Hilda's daughter made reply ;  
 Rather than marry Hartmuth, I'd lay me down and die :  
 'Tis not to him allotted, to woo me as his bride,  
 And sooner would I perish than be queen at Hartmuth's side.

Ludwig is probably little accustomed to opposition, especially from a captive and a girl, so without more ceremony, "he seized the maiden by her hair and flung her in the sea". Hartmuth plunges in after her and saves her. Then turning indignantly to his father :

Out spake the noble Hartmuth : what would you drown my wife,  
 The fair Gudrune, and know you not I love her as my life?

Ludwig, ashamed and sorry, entreats his son to make his peace with Gudrune and sends a message to his wife Gerlinda, bidding her and her daughter, with all their train of noble knights and damsels, prepare to welcome the royal captive on her landing. He is obeyed ; but Gudrune, while she returns the embrace of the princess, recoils with horror from that of Gerlinda, whom she regards as the primary cause of all her sufferings. Hartmuth still trusts to time and his own love and eloquence; but in vain, and he rejects indignantly the proposal of his not very gentle mother to try severer means. But ere long, he departs on a distant expedition and Gerlinda, free from his supervision, resorts to expedients of her own to tame the inexorable damsel.

Then thus said the she-devil unto the maiden fair.  
If thou repulse my kindness, then grief shall be thy share.  
Now look around and tell me, who will come unto thine aid?  
Thou must heat my chamber oven, and bind the wood, fair maid.

Gudrune obeys in dignified silence, and so matters go on for three years till Hartmuth returns from the wars. Great is his indignation on learning how his captive has been treated and his mother is forced to promise to use her better for the future.

But he soon departs once more, after vain endeavours to move Gudrune, and the queen recommences her system of persecution, always carefully concealing it from her son, when at home, while Gudrune prefers every species of suffering to sanctioning his pretensions by applying to him for protection. At length, however, urged by his vassals and his own passion, Hartmuth resolves to force his prisoner to compliance.

He cried, thou loveliest of maids, thou must be mine and now  
My vassals do thee homage. Let the diadem deck thy brow.

Then spake the beauteous damsel: no, no! that cannot be,  
So harshly does your mother demean herself to me;  
Captive and broken hearted, I seek no warrior's love.  
And you and all your cruel race, I hate all things above.

That grieves me, answered Hartmuth, but if I can atone  
All that my mother in her wrath to pain your heart has done;  
Believe me, I will make amends and joy to soothe your woe.  
No, no; replied the maiden, I will not trust you, no.

Then spoke the youthful Hartmuth, the lord of Normanland:  
You know, full well, obedient unto my least command  
Is the land and all its warriors and its citizens beside;  
And who will hang me, if I force you to become my bride?

That were a deed, replied the maid, would ill a king beseem.  
That, by my faith, I never feared not even in a dream;  
If other princes heard the tale, at once would they declare  
King Hagan's grand-child had been shamed by Ludwig's royal heir.

These words and the impression they make on Hartmuth who at once withdraws his threat, places before us in a strong light the peculiar position of the women of the north at the commencement of the middle ages. Often the victims of the brutality of the male sex, they were safe from their passions. They might be beaten, reduced to slavery, killed, but not dishonored.

Once more Hartmuth is touched and softened, and Gudrune is removed from her humble apartment to the most gorgeous in the castle, and every thing homage or flattery can do to win her heart, is tried; but to no purpose.

She is the affianced bride of Herwig, and we know with what religious veneration the ties of betrothal were and still are regarded by the nations of the north. Her reply is calm and resolute.

You know full well, lord Hartmuth, whate'er be your design,  
That I was plighted to a king, his hand was laid in mine,  
With solemn oath and promise, to be his wedded bride,  
And were he dead, I ne'er would sit another man beside.

At last angry and wearied, the young king again quits the land for a distant expedition; leaving Gudrune to the tender mercies of his mother, but with the strictest charge to use her well. This recommendation is observed like the last, and Gudrune remains an uncomplaining victim to the queen's cruelties for

six long years, making in all above eighteen, so that she has now attained the ripe age of thirty four.

But our northern ancestors, more gallant than their degenerate descendants, seem to have granted the fair sex the privilege of almost unfading youth and loveliness.

In the Nibelungen, for instance, we are perpetually reminded of Chriemhild's surpassing charms, when she has attained more than her fiftieth year. Perhaps the fact may be accounted for in a manner less flattering to female vanity, by remembering that the form in which these lays have reached us is evidently far from being the original, and that in the process of changing, adding, and grafting new incidents upon the old, certain anomalies and anachronisms could scarcely fail to arise.

At length one winter morning, as the captive with her faithful maiden and companion Hildeburg is washing linen on the sea-shore (one of the many cruel tasks to which she is condemned), she beholds two warriors approaching. These are no other than Herwig and Ortwein who have contrived, rather late, it must be confessed, to assemble a fleet and army and have just landed on the shores of Norway to learn the fate of the captive, to rescue or avenge her.

She is about to fly (for her costume is somewhat of the lightest), when Ortwein's enquiry whether she knows any thing of a certain maiden called Gudrune arrests her steps. On her replying that she is one of Gudrune's companions in captivity, Herwig shows her a ring he had received from her the day of their betrothal, and a recognition ensues which is

touchingly described. Herwig would fain bear her off; but Ortwein opposes it, declaring he will regain her as she was taken, by force of arms, and they depart, promising her speedy rescue, while Gudrune, with awakened indignation, flings the linen into the sea, declaring she will wash it no more.

Her reception on her return may be imagined and, to avoid the indignities with which she is threatened, she, for the first time, condescends to deception and promises her hand to the still devoted Hartmuth who accepts it with rapture. Natural, nay, almost inevitable as would be this deception in another in such a position, it almost shocks us in Gudrune, so incompatible does the slightest deviation from truth, appear in one so pure and so heroic.

But the hour of retribution for all her sorrows is at hand; at midnight the sound of martial steps and the glimmer of arms (for we are expressly told that the moon stood high in the heavens) attract the attention of the watchman on the tower. Instantly Hartmuth and his men are roused. A desperate conflict ensues. Ludwig falls beneath the arm of Herwig, and Gerlinda, wild with fury, has ordered Gudrune's head to be struck off, when Hartmuth, though hard-pressed by Wate, sees her danger and arrests it by word and gesture. The tide of battle turns against the Norwegians, and Ortrune throwing herself at Gudrune's feet implores her to save her brother.

Then answered Hilda's daughter: what thou say'st is just and right;  
And yet, in sooth, I know not how to stay the murderous fight:  
If I were but a warrior, then with my good right arm  
I'd rush amid the fight and save thy brother's life from harm.

So saying, she steps forth on the battlement and perceiving her betrothed, implores him with a loud voice to rescue Hartmuth.

For the love of fair Gudruna, the gallant Herwig sprang  
At once betwixt the combatants; the clash of iron rang;  
The grim old Wate could never brook that thus his destined prey,  
In the very heat of battle, should be foully torn away.

Then at the noble Herwig he aim'd a furious blow,  
And he who came to part the foes, now at their feet lay low;  
Then sprang his warriors to his aid and bore him from the spot;  
But Hartmuth and his men were all doomed to a captive's lot.

It was something, however, to escape with life from so deadly an adversary; Herwig, on his part, manifests no resentment for the blow he has received: Wate's peculiarities seem to have been pretty generally known, and who ever ventured to oppose him was aware, beforehand, of what he might expect.

All is now quickly over and, in a few minutes, the castle and the town are in the hand of the victors, while the cruel Gerlinda prostrate at the feet of her fair captive, implores the mercy she has never shown.

Then thus spoke Hilda's daughter: unhappy! can'st thou dare  
To seek from me for mercy? how can I grant thy prayer!  
Didst thou e'er listen to my cry, or soften my sad fate,  
And can'st thou marvel that my heart at length has learnt to hate.

But this is only a momentary ebullition! Her generous nature triumphs and she bids Gerlinda conceal herself amid her maidens. It is time, for at the same moment the terrible Wate rushes into the apartment.

With eyes that flashed with fury and beard that floated wide;  
Before the lord of Stormland trembled all at Gudrune's side.

Gudrune alone approached him, and the fearful silence broke  
Queen Hilda's sinless daughter; with anxious voice she spoke:  
Welcome brave Wate, how gladly should I behold thee here,  
Had not so many fall'n beneath thy fearful sword and spear.

Thanks, virgin fair and noble; are you dame Hilda's child?  
And who are all these women? he cried with anger wild.

Gudrune assures him there are none there save  
Ortrune to whom she owes so much gratitude, and  
her own former attendants, her fellow captives. Wate  
retires but for a moment only. Then returning in  
fury, he demands that all those shall be given up to  
him who forced Gudrune

To wash-upon the strand;  
And all those who have slaughter'd the warriors of our land.

The hero storm'd and threaten'd yet Gudrune would not yield,  
Then an attendant maiden by a side glance revealed  
Where mid the train Gerlinda was crouch'd with death like brow.  
Ha! Dame Gerlinda! need ye more washerwomen now?

By both her hands he seized her and rudely dragged away  
In vain the wretched woman began to weep and pray;  
Great Queen, he cried in fury, you shall have the measure due,  
I'll take good care my princess washes no more clothes for you.

And as he fiercely dragged her through the half open door,  
All that he meant to do was plain, despite her weeping sore;  
It needed no long questioning, he seized her by the hair  
And severed, from the trunk, her head; his fury would not spare.

The entrance of Ortwein and Herwig put an end  
to this terrible scene. The conquerors embark for

Heligoland carrying with them their royal captives and countless treasures. Unspeakable is the delight of Queen Hilda when she once more clasps her long lost daughter to her bosom and joyfully does she welcome her brave deliverers, above all, the grim old Wate whose harsh voice and stern features soften, as he bows his proud head to kiss the hand of his beloved queen.

At the entreaty of the generous Gudrune, Hilda not only embraces the weeping Ortrune, but releases Hartmuth from the dungeon into which he has been thrown and even permits him to present himself before her, on his solemn promise not to attempt an escape, while Gudrune privately sends him rich garments and bids the bath be prepared for him, a luxury which, from its frequent mention in these old poems, seems to have been quite as highly prized by the nations of the north in the middle ages, as by the Greeks and Romans of antiquity. In all habitations of importance there were baths both hot and cold, besides public ones for both sexes (<sup>1</sup>).

When Hartmuth appears in the royal hall splendidly arrayed, in all his manly beauty, many a damsel wonders in her secret heart how Gudrune could resist so gallant and handsome a suitor.

True to her generous nature, the princess persuades her mother to restore Hartmuth to freedom, on condition of his wedding her friend and chosen companion Hildeburga, herself of royal blood; a proposition to which he accedes without much difficulty since all

---

(1) Die Frauen des Mittelalters von Weinholtz.

hopes of winning Gudrune have vanished. Ortrune becomes the bride of Ortwein and these unions, together with that so long delayed of Gudrune and Herwig are celebrated with infinite splendour.

Then to each guest Queen Hilda, bid rich apparel bring,  
Had you but seen the brave old Wate, how he galloped round  
the ring;

How Irold and how Fruto, their manly strength displayed:  
Had ye heard the lances crushing and seen the glittering blade!  
Although there was but little wind, the dust was black as night.  
But the heroes little heeded, whether it was dark or bright.

and now the moment of separation arrives; Hartmuth touched and grateful, departs for Norway with Hildeburga, and Hilda implores her daughter to send her thrice a year a messenger

to tell me of thy state;  
Then may I linger out my life, nor murmur against my fate,

Then thus the noble Gudrune spake; mother it shall be so.  
From the castle of her ancestors, with mingled joy and woe,  
She went, but oft did she look back, with all her maiden train.  
So many lovely damsels there were ne'er beheld again.

Such is an outline of this remarkable poem. All the personages are delineated with so much truth, that we feel as though we were personally acquainted with each individual and enter into all his joys and sorrows, as into those of a dear and intimate friend. The occasional touches of tenderness and softness relieve the dark back-ground of the picture and shed a chastened beauty over the wild and romantic scene. The maternal affection of Hilda, the pitying gentleness of Ortrune, so finely contrasted with the

malignity of her mother, the mixture of fierce passion and chivalric generosity in Hartmuth, but above all the heroic fortitude, the pious resignation and the angelic mercy of Gudrune are drawn with exquisite truth and delicacy.

It requires no common skill to interest us alike in the victim and the persecutor, to render Gudrune so unspeakably touching and yet Hartmuth neither odious nor detestable, and to carry us without weariness through 4700 verses all written with the utmost simplicity and dealing with a period so far removed from our own in manners, habits and customs.

We owe the preservation of this poem to the Emperor Maximilian 1<sup>st</sup> by whose orders this and several others, among them the Nibelungen, were inscribed in a huge parchment volume and carefully placed in the royal library at castle Ambras in the Tyrol in 1517. It was not however till exactly three hundred years later that Von der Hagen published a correct edition of it in his "Heldenbuch".

---

(1) Grimm's Heldenage Vol. 2. p. 49.

(2) Gervinus. Vol. 1st p. 338.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE CYCLE OF DIETRICH OR THEODORIC. — THE ECKEN AUS-FAHRT. — THE BATTLE OF RAVENNA. — THE ROSENGARTEN, DWARF LAURIN.

We have already seen Dietrich or Theodoric, bearing a triumphant part in the fearful struggle between the Huns and the Burgundians; now we are to behold him conqueror in other fields, sometimes alone, sometimes in company with Etzel and Siegfried.

Our limits will admit only of our noticing the most important of those lays which have reached us and we will begin with the Eckenlied, written, like most of these old poems, in verses of thirteen syllables.

The scene opens in a pagan land where three giants Fasolt, Ecke and Ebenrot, seated in their gloomy halls, are discussing the merits of the heroes of the day.

The palm is awarded to Dietrich of Berne who has overcome the giant Grimer and his hardly less redoubtable spouse, dame Hilta; but these praises rouse the envy of one of the brothers, Ecket, who declares he shall not enjoy one moment's peace, till he has met and subdued this far famed warrior and

the earnest desire manifested by three fair princesses who hold their court in the neighbourhood to behold the King of Berne captive, lends fresh impetus to his purpose. So forth he sets, not on horseback, for no animal save an elephant could have borne such an enormous weight, but on foot, striding over rocks and rivers, and scaring the wild beasts of the forest by his voice and tread. At length, he reaches Worms where he expected to find Dietrich, but discovers, to his great annoyance, that he is in the Tyrol. Thither he wends accordingly and finds the king who on his part has not been idle, as is attested by the slaughtered corpses strewn along the road side.

Brave as he is; however, the aspect of the giant somewhat staggers Dietrich, especially when he learns he is expected to leave his trusty charger and combat on foot; but, piqued by the taunts of his assailant, he at length consents and the fight begins. It is still at its height when the sun sets. The two warriors suspend hostilities and pass the night in peace, the one keeping watch and ward while the other slumbers, like Highland chiefs of old.

No sooner does morning dawn, than the giant, whose manners are somewhat of the roughest (what else could be expected from an individual twelve feet high), rouses his adversary with a kick and the combat recommences.

The birds with merry carol hailed the near approach of day,  
The thrush and blackbird sweetly sung, on bank and bush  
and spray.

But the rattling of the warriors' mail o'erpowered their little throats;  
What cared the giant, think ye, for the birds' melodious notes?

The combat is long and obstinate. Often Dietrich is so hard pressed as to despair of victory. But a friendly dwarf, perched on a neighbouring tree, breathes hope and courage to his faltering soul. With a last effort, he hurls the giant to the earth and, his generous nature prevailing, offers him his life if he will surrender. But Ecke spurns the proposal and Dietrich gives the final blow, then leaves the spot, though not without a prayer for the soul of his vanquished adversary whom he evidently regards with a kindly feeling, as Roderick did St. James;

„As foeman worthy of his steel". (1)

In the battle of Ravenna, in which an historical event is strangely metamorphosed, we find Dietrich at the court of Etzel's, whither he has betaken himself to shun the treachery of his uncle Hermanric and where he is received with royal hospitality.

At the entreaty of his wife Herka, and as some acknowledgment for the many services Dietrich has rendered him, King Etzel's provides him with a numerous army to reconquer the land whence he has been unjustly driven. Etzel's sons, still in the early bloom of youth, implore their sire's permission to accompany the hero to the fight, and at length, succeed in obtaining it despite his forebodings, on Dietrich's pledging himself for their safety. They depart; Dietrich does his best to redeem his pledge, resisting all the royal boys' supplications to take part in the combat and, leaving them in his capital of Verona

(1) The oldest M. S. of the Ecken Ausfahrt is in the Dresden Codex.

under the care of his most trusty warrior Ilsan, with strict injunctions to watch over their safety, and, to reconcile them to this disappointment, he bids his only brother Diether remain and bear them company. But the young princes, burning with martial ardour, contrive to elude the vigilance of their guardian and hasten to the scene of combat. On their way they meet Wittich a giant and one of the fiercest of Hermanric's warriors. In the pride of boyish courage, they attack him, but both, together with their faithful Diether, fall beneath his mighty arm. Dietrich arrives at the spot in time only to receive the parting breath of the elder of the unhappy boys.

Furious with rage and grief, he pursues their destroyer who, leaping into the sea to escape his vengeance, is received and sheltered by a mermaid.

Now when the noble Dietrich returned unto the plain,  
He knelt beside the princes and kissed their wounds again.  
His heart was full of anguish. Oh, would to God! he said,  
That all my woes were over and I laid beside ye dead!

The gallant Rüdiger, one of the heroes of the Nibelungen, who had accompanied Dietrich on his enterprise, offers to break the fatal tidings to the unhappy queen and her terrible lord. The anguish of the broken-hearted mother, on beholding her sons' chargers return without their masters and learning that they lie dead upon the plain, is touchingly described. In her maternal agony, she curses Dietrich; but on learning how the event really occurred and that the Bernese has lost his own beloved brother in the same combat which cost the lives of her children,

she rescinds her malediction, and promises to intercede for him with Etzel before whom Dietrich dares not present himself till assured that the monarch's fury is in some degree appeased.

Then, low at mighty Etzel's feet, King Dietrich bowed his head:  
Queen Hilka's bosom, at the sight, with gentlest pity bled.  
She could not bear to see him thus and weepingly she cried;  
He loved our sons, his brother too died fighting at their side.

Then thus the gallant Dietrich spoke; his grief all well might see:  
Great Etzel, noble monarch, avenge thy wrongs on me,  
Avenge thy sinless children; Alas! they both are slain;  
Then take the life I offer, I shall ne'er know joy again.

No, no; it was no fault of thine: however sad my heart,  
I know that in my children's fate, thou hadst nor share nor part.

This said, he placed him by his side: although he grieved sore  
His friendship for King Dietrich was as warm as heretofore.

and with this touching picture of the redoubtable Etzel, the lay terminates. (1)

The most important and best preserved of these Dietrich lays is the "Rosengarten"; it thus commences:

Upon the lordly Rhine, there lies a fair and goodly town,  
An antique city and well known to knight of high renown.  
Here dwelt a gallant hero, all both knew and feared his sword.  
His name was Giebig and he reigned, a mighty prince and lord.

(1) The battle of Ravenna appears to have been first published by Caspar von der Rön in his *Heldenbuch*.

His gentle wife had given him three sons both fair and brave;  
The fourth child was a girl who brought unto a bloody grave  
Full many a noble warrior, as the old tale hath said.  
Her name was Chriemhild; never yet was seen a lovelier maid.

A garden of sweet roses was the beauteous virgin's pride;  
A mile, at least, it was in length, and half a mile t'was wide.  
Around, instead of walls of stone, was a silken thread so fine.  
No bower on earth, Chriemhild exclaimed, is like this bower of mine

My gardeners are twelve gallant knights; their arms are bold  
and strong,

And they will guard my roses, so that none shall do me wrong.  
The first knight is my father, a king of power and fame;  
The second are my brothers, noble and free from shame.

Then follows an enumeration of the other defenders; the twelfth and last is the gallant Siegfried, the affianced husband of the fair dame. Meanwhile, the fame of this garden and of the beauty of its mistress spreads far and wide and Dietrich, the young lord of Berne, sends a courteous message to Giebig, expressing a desire to see the roses and their queen. When, however, he learns the condition attached to this privilege, viz.; that of vanquishing the knights who guard the holy precincts, he hesitates and would have abandoned the enterprise, but for the energetic remonstrances of old Hildebrand who declares that to reject the challenge would be a stain on his honour for ever. Accordingly, accompanied by a chosen band of followers, he sets off for the city of Worms. On the way, Hildebrand recollecting an ancient comrade, called Ilsan, who, for the last 20 years, has retired to a cloister, but was famed in his youth for

his strong hand and bold heart; summons him to join the party. Ilsan, after a little decent resistance, consents, despite the entreaties and threats of the Abbot who is sadly scandalized at such a breach of discipline.

They reach Worms in safety and are met by Giebig with a splendid retinue, all arrayed in scarlet and gold. The monarchs greet each other with royal courtesy;

The Bernois spoke: ye well may laugh to find that we have come,  
For an empty wreath of roses, so far from land and home;  
Or that, for such light matter, I have girded sword and shield;  
But unto this has brought us the pride of fair Chriemhild.

Giebig replied; it is her will, she has knights of gallant fame,  
To whom the sternest conflict is but an infant's game.  
If they resolve to combat, t'were vain their sword to stay,  
They will not from their fierce intent, let me do what I may.

We see poor Günther, or Giebig, is always pretty much the same weak, vacillating personage.

Dietrich replies in the same warlike yet courteous strain and, a truce being agreed upon, the two kings and their followers enter Worms side by side, where the fair Chriemhild herself, with all her virgin train, comes forth to welcome them.

Then splendidly adorned herself, full many a lovely maid,  
And many a highborn matron; so the legend old hath said:  
With gold and shining jewels, their floating locks were bound;  
Three hundred beauteous maidens stood their noble queen around.

But the royal virgin's garments were more splendid far tenfold;  
Upon her radiant brow she wore a crown of dazzling gold:  
Diamonds and gems of countless price gave lustre to her een,  
Then thus the gallant Irin spoke; behold, there comes the queen.

Her air of conscious insolence rouses my rage I own,  
She looks as though she thought we ne'er had seen a precious stone.  
If I were only near enough, I'd give her such a blow,  
I warrant she'd remember it, long as she lives below.

Even the bluff old Hildebrand is horror-struck at such an unmanly suggestion and Dietrich sternly bids his followers remember the respect due to noble ladies.. It is evident, however, from this trait, that the lay dates from at least as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century for, in the palmy days of chivalry, no minstrel could have ventured to attribute such an idea even to the fiercest and rudest of warriors.

Chriemhild, however, is received with all due reverence.

Welcome my noble lord of Bern, thou king of power and might;  
And welcome to these heroes all; doubtless they're bold in fight.  
I have heard much of thy valour, in minstrel song and lay:  
Thou hast slain full many a gallant knight, they tell me, in thy day.

I am not the boldest, lady, in that ye judge me wrong,  
Yet I would not be the faintest heart amid this gallant throng.  
They all are brave and fearless, as they'll prove ere long in strife.  
Thy haughty spirit, lady fair, will cost full many a life.

A few days pass calmly enough. But the Bernese grow weary of so monotonous an existence and, ere the truce is expired, they propose that the combat shall begin.

So be it, spoke King Giebig, and I will be the first;  
For the love of my fair daughter, I'll gladly brave the worst.

Hildebrand offers himself as the king's antagonist though he is above a hundred years old; Siegfried

is to be opposed by the King of Berne himself, and the other warriors being fairly matched, the combat commences. The prize is a wreath of roses and a kiss from the lips of Chriemhild. But Dietrich and his warriors seem to have been actuated by the desire rather to humble her pride, than to win her favour. Fortune smiles upon them despite the valour and gigantic strength of Chriemhild's champions. One after the other is vanquished and disabled and the princess, with aching heart, is compelled to crown the hated victors, while poor Giebig looks on with hopeless anguish, cursing the roses and his own folly.

Walter of Aquitaine who, here once more, appears upon the scene, alone defends himself so valiantly against his antagonist that both are declared entitled to the palm of victory. Giebig himself is hurled to the ground by the stalwart arm of the venerable Hildebrand, and is saved only by the intercession of his daughter.

Chriemhild's last hopes rest on Siegfried who, for reasons not very clearly explained, has hitherto kept aloof from the combat, but who now, rushing forwards, challenges the King of Berne himself to the fight.

Dietrich, however, feels little inclination to meet the redoubtable dragon-killer and declines the challenge.

Then the old but gallant Hildebrand thus spoke unto his lord;  
If a coward dare assail him he will fall beneath his sword;  
But if his name be Dietrich and he bear a heart of steel,  
He may inflict on him a wound that will not quickly heal.

No, no ; I dare not meet him ; I neither will nor can ;  
 Bring hither to the garden some other gallant man  
 With flesh and bones as I have ; with him I'll gladly fight.  
 Thus spoke the royal Dietrich ; but did he speak aright ?

Hildebrand, the aged, turn'd from his lord away ;  
 And the large tears chased each other, down his beard so  
 long and grey.

His nephew Wolfshart, enquires the cause :

Wolfshart, the brave old warrior cried, wilt aid me in my need ?  
 Then arm thee quickly, nephew, and follow where I lead :  
 I must ride hence, far o'er the plain, to yonder mountain steep ;  
 For twixt me and my royal lord is anger stern and deep.

And yet, trust me, his anger is not half so fierce as mine :  
 But soon I'll rouse his fury, such at least is my design ;  
 Though I shall be the first to fall, I'll gladly hail my doom.  
 When thou hear'st the clashing of our swords, then, youthful  
 hero, come !

Hildebrand, accordingly, seeks Dietrich and persuades him to accompany him to the spot indicated. Then, springing from his horse and facing the king who has likewise dismounted,

Tell me upon thy honour, art thou the lord of Berne  
 To whom King Dietmar left his realms, that monarch proud  
 and stern ?  
 Doubtless I am, said Dietrich, seest thou any change ?  
 What canst thou mean, good master ? thy question seems  
 most strange.

No, no ; so help me heaven ! you lie, cried noble Hildebrand  
 Full many are called Dietrich, who rule not Dietrich's land,  
 No thou art not my sovereign, base dastard as thou art !  
 Thou art not like the lord of Berne, that prince of stalwart heart.

I have ever seen him bear himself with honour mid the strife:  
'Gainst the wild beasts of the forest, thou perchance may'st  
risk thy life;

In the woods thou may'st have courage, where to see thee  
there are none;

Thou dar'st not fight for noble dames, where fame is to be won.

I will no longer serve thee, thou coward mean and base,  
And if thou wilt not combat, I defy thee to thy face.  
Then spoke the gallant lord of Berne; thou art deceived, I see,  
But thou mayst yet repent it, all dastard though I be;

Take heed, good master to thy words, tho' thou art bold and  
strong;

How wilt thou carry out thy threat? I'll shew it thee ere long.  
Then high he swung his mighty fist, the master true and good,  
And struck his sovereign in the face, in fierce and wrathful mood.

This rouses Dietrich with a vengeance. Drawing his sword, he gives Hildebrand a blow with the hilt, however, which nearly upsets him and follows this practical proof of his renewed vigour by a shower of blows with the blunt edge, which convinces the good Hildebrand that he has effected his purpose, though nearly at the cost of his own life. Wolfshart who is near, seeing the king's fury, rides up at full speed.

He cried; my lord King Dietrich, will you slay your vassal true?  
Yet dare not meet a champion, in lovely ladies' view.

Dietrich confesses it were folly, but that, now his blood is up, he is capable of any thing and bids Wolfshart beware lest he treat him like his uncle.

"Heaven defend me!" cries Wolfshart, adding that he is by no means sorry to see the king fairly roused and that he hopes he now will redeem his honour.

Then spake the noble lord of Berne ; of that, young man, no more :  
In all my life, I never felt so strangely weak before ;  
But bring me now my gallant steed, my vassal bold and true,  
And I will show proud Siegfried yet, wha' this right arm can do.

The hero burnt with fury, he seized his sword and shield,  
And ere long stood, in angry mood, before the Queen Chriemhild.

Then defying Siegfried who accepts the challenge, the two bravest champions in Christendom meet for the first time in arms.

Siegfried thought of all the kisses his Chriemhild would bestow ; Then the noble hero felt his soul with tenfold ardour glow, He fought as fights the lion, that on his foe would spring ; The lord of Berne he soon began to chase around the ring.

Then spoke the beauteous Chriemhild ; look, look ! ye ladies mine ; That is the gallant Siegfried, hero of nether Rhine ; See how he drives King Dietrich before his mighty arm ! Above all earthly warriors, my Siegfried bears the palm.

But the queen's triumph is somewhat premature ; Hildebrand, to whose loyal zeal the somewhat rude discipline received at his master's hands has only added fresh stimulus, no sooner learns how matters stand than declaring that Dietrich is not yet sufficiently roused (a state essential apparently to the development of his faculties bodily and mental), he bids his nephew tell him in all haste, that his faithful vassal has died from the effect of his blows ; trusting to his

remorse and affection for the desired result. He is not mistaken.

Is the brave Hildebrand really dead? exclaimed the Lord of Berne;  
Where shall I find another friend so faithful, though so stern?  
Now guard thy life, bold Siegfried, thou shalt be sorely prest  
For the way that I have fought till now has only been in jest.

Defend thyself with all thy strength, if thou'lt find the need anon,  
For nothing now shall part us, except the death of one.

Siegfried replies with a bold defiance and the combat is renewed but with a far different result.

E'en as a house will smoke and burn when it is set on fire,  
So Dietrich belched forth fire and flame, that man of wrath and ire.

Siegfried's horny covering melts before them and, for the first time, he flies. Dietrich pursues and is about to despatch him, when Chriemhild, forgetting all her pride, rushes forward and throws her veil over him. At the same moment Dietrich beholds Hildebrand at his side.

Ye have won a glorious victory, and I am born anew!  
Dietrich's iron heart was melted when he saw his follower true;  
His rage was hushed, he kissed him and many a tear he shed.  
I will thank God to-day, he cried; my friend thou art not dead.

Else had I listened unto nought, neither to prayer nor tear;  
With Siegfried all was over; thy life had cost him dear.

All being now settled, Dietrich and his followers retire in triumph to Berne, while Siegfried and Giebig are forced to pay the penalty of their rash defiance by doing homage to the victors. No stronger

proof can be adduced of the almost superstitious veneration with which the memory of Dietrich or Theodoric was regarded, than the fact that, in the only lay in which he and Siegfried are introduced together, even the fame of the dragon-killer is sacrificed to that of the Gothic sovereign.

The Rosengarten continued popular among the Germans till late in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A garden, the supposed scene of the combat, was long pointed out at Worms to the curious and Ilsan is believed to be the original of the monk in Fischer's *Gagarantua*. (1)

"Dwarf Laurin" or the lesser Rosengarten is founded on a legend somewhat resembling that already mentioned, save that here the garden is defended, not by a band of gallant knights, but by the single arm of the dwarf himself who, being endowed with supernatural strength, vanquishes all his assailants, cuts off their hands and feet and leaves them to live or die as they may.

Notwithstanding the passion for roses which seems to have pervaded the human race at this period, this was deemed rather too high a price for so frail a treasure, and for some time the garden remained unmolested. At length Dietrich of Steermark whose sister has been carried off by the malignant dwarf and is kept close prisoner in this very spot, resolves on rescuing her or perishing in the attempt. Dietrich of Berne, ever ready to aid the unfortunate, offers to share the enterprize. They reach the garden but Laurin contrives to lure their footsteps to a hollow

---

(1) A satirical poem of the 16th century.

rock and there, lulling them to sleep by a magic song, seals the mouth of the cave and abandons them to their fate. Dietrich, however, awakes and, perceiving his condition, falls into the most violent passion and the flames which, in consequence, issue from his mouth burn the bonds that confine him! Releasing his fellow captives, he bursts open the mouth of the cave and rushes forth to seek his treacherous foe whom he discovers surrounded by an army of dwarfs ready to obey his bidding. But the dauntless valour of Dietrich and his companions triumphs. The dwarfs fly on every side, and Laurin himself is sent prisoner to Berne, where, according to the story, being set at liberty, he gained his livelihood for the rest of his days by tumbling; rather an ignoble termination to a royal career.

---

## CHAPTER VII.

CHARLEMAGNE AND HIS ERA: RELIGIOUS POETRY FROM THE NINTH TO THE TWELFTH CENTURY. — THE LUDWIGS' LIED. — THE DRAMA. — HROSWITHA.

WITH the Rosengarten closes the cycle of the Etzels the Dietrichs and the Hagans of the north. Indeed, in order to present them to our readers collectively, we have somewhat disregarded strict chronological order; for while the Hildebrand Lied, and the Walter of Aquitaine belong to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Rosengarten, Dwarf Laurin etc. though in their primitive form probably quite as ancient, have reached us only in the garb in which they were arrayed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

But it must not be supposed that, during this long interval, the flame of poetry was completely extinguished in Germany.

The era of Charlemagne, in all respects so remarkable, could not be without influence on the literature of Germany, then in a condition of almost primitive rudeness. The mighty conqueror, the wise lawgiver, in the midst of all his gigantic labours,

found time to occupy himself in improving the idiom of his native land. Not only was the German language taught by his command in the schools and academies he opened in all parts of the empire, but he himself composed the elements of a grammar for the use of his subjects. He passed many hours of the night in acquiring, or at least perfecting himself in the art of writing neglected in his youth, and which in those times insured for its possessor a respect and consideration, no caligraphy now a days, however beautiful, could presume to claim. In his rare moments of leisure he studied grammar, astronomy and dialectics, and invited his courtiers to follow his example. Nothing afflicted him more than the ignorance of all around him and particularly of the doctors of the church, and he wrote in the most earnest tone to the heads of monasteries and bishoprics, urging them to unite, to the practice of their religious duties, those less sacred but still important studies, which elevate the mind and develope the intellectual faculties. To live well, he writes, is undoubtedly pleasing to God; but to speak well is also pleasing. Is it not treating Him with indifference to recite his praises in a discourse full of dissonances? A pure and correct language is a far higher tribute of reverence.

Charlemagne recompensed, with imperial munificence, the learned men who resorted to his court; Alcuin, Theodolphus and Paul Winifred were honoured with his peculiar confidence.

The first born at York, had studied in the monastic schools of England and Ireland where science

had taken refuge. "He was", says Mr. Guizot, "a theologian by profession, but the spirit of theology did not reign exclusively in his mind. Mathematics, astronomy, and rhetoric also occupied his attention.

He is a monk, a light of the contemporary church; but at the same time a learned man, as well as a classical scholar. Charlemagne conferred on him the rich abbeys of Ferrieres, St. Loup, St. Josse and St. Martin de Tours, at the latter of which he died. Theodolphus, of Gothic origin was promoted to the Bishopric of Orleans. Paul Winifred had been summoned to teach the Greek language to the Princess Rotrude, when affianced to Constantine, son to Irene.

But to none did Charlemagne evince an affection so warm as towards Eginhard, his secretary and, according to tradition, related to him by still nearer ties. While on the one hand we cannot help regretting that the charming legend of his loves with the fair Emma should be proved to be a mere fabrication, on the other it is some consolation to reflect that Eginhard, who certainly plays rather an unworthy part in the affair, never really betrayed the confidence of his illustrious master.

The memoirs he has bequeathed us of Charlemagne are doubly precious, both as presenting the mighty emperor under his true aspect of sustained and tranquil greatness, and as testifying that even in that age of ignorance and barbarism, there were still writers who retained not only some portion of learning, but even a certain originality of mind and loftiness of sentiment. As a further proof that all elegance

and energy of style had not disappeared, we may cite that charming picture drawn by the Bishop Theophilas in which we behold Charlemagne reposing an instant from his labours, while his fair daughters crown his brow with flowers, Bertha with violets, Rotrude with roses, and Giselle with lilies; or that graphic description given by the monk of St. Gall of the splendid hunt offered by the emperor to the Avar chief Tudan, on his submission to the imperial authority; a poor compensation for the loss of liberty and independent rule.

What can be more graceful than the portrait of the queen and the royal daughters! "The lovely spouse of Charles, the Queen Luitgarde, appeared at the head of the royal family. A crimson ribbon which bound her temples confined her hair crowned by a diadem of precious stones; her robe is of purple twice dyed and a chlamyde, fastened to her neck by a clasp of gold, floats gracefully over her shoulders. A necklace of gems, the most costly and varied, falls on her bosom. She is mounted on a superb steed; the lords and squires surround her."

"The royal youths follow in the distance, each with his special train. First comes Charles, the monarch's eldest son, who bears the name and features of his father. Beneath him bounds a fiery courser. Then Pepin, the conqueror of the Avars, in whom revives the glory of his ancestor."

"Then arrives the batallion of the young girls. Rotrude advances first, on a noble charger which she guides with skill and address. Her golden hair is bound by a fillet of amethyst hue, glittering with sapphires

and diamonds. A crown of pearls adorns her brow and a large clasp of gold confines her mantle. Bertha comes next. She has the port, the features, the voice of her sire; his courage too, for she is his living image. Her locks are tressed with threads of gold; on her forehead is a golden diadem; round her neck an ermine cape; her robe is covered with gems and her mantle with bands of gold."

"Giselle appears the third. Modest virgin, she has quitted the solitude of the cloister to follow the father she loves. The robe of the abbess is interwoven with threads of pale pink and gold. Her features, her looks, seem to shed around an aureole of light and at the glances of so many men her snowy neck is coloured with a modest blush".

"Rhodarde precedes the train of her followers; her bosom, neck and hair sparkle with the most splendid jewels. Her mantle is of silk, her diadem of pearls. Then comes Theodrade, a fair child, daughter to Fastrade, with rosy cheeks and snowy brow and tresses yellower than gold".

But this and most of the literary productions of the age were it must be remembered in the Latin tongue. In the native dialect we find save the Hildbrands Lied, and the Weisbrunnen Gebet already mentioned and belonging to the very commencement of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, only a fragment by an author of the singular name of Muspili, or Heliand of Heliand, as he is designated by professor Schmeller who drew forth the work from the profound obscurity in which, for more than a thousand years, it had been buried. Full of wild but striking origi-

nality, deep power and pathos, the little that remains of this poem, the death and resurrection of Christ, evince an immeasurable superiority over all other existing relics of German literature of the same epoch. (1) Some thirty years later, we find the hymns of Otfried, a Benedictine monk, written in a very different tone; mild and gentle and, though possessing little merit in a poetic point of view, yet important in the history of the German language as presenting the first instance in which alliteration is superseded by verse. Meanwhile the political horizon grew darker and darker. When the hand which alone could guide and controul the vast empire it had formed, had mouldered into dust, the natural consequences of the immense extent and divided nationality of that empire became at once apparent. Its weight proved too heavy for the feeble hands of Charlemagne's son, Louis the pious, who, possessing every gentle and domestic virtue, had neither the decision nor the energy indispensable to a monarch in those rude, unsettled times.

The storm which lowered so heavily during his reign, burst in all its fury in that of his successor, Lothario. While the south of Europe was distracted with the fatal conflict between Charles the Bold and Louis the German, calamities still more terrible menaced France itself. Already while Charlemagne reigned triumphant, had those hardy Northmen, des-

---

(1) Helland's Evangelien-Harmonien, von Scheller herausgegeben.  
München 1830.

tined to achieve such mighty conquests, ventured to approach his shores. Scarcely indeed had they perceived his presence, when they set sail again precipitately; but the emperor, with presaging heart, foreboded the misfortunes they would bring upon his people. "Rising from table," says the monk of St. Gall "he stood apart, tears in his eyes, none venturing to address him". At length turning to those around, "my friends", he said, "know you why I weep? I fear not these pirates, but I grieve that, I living, they dare insult this coast; for I foresee all the miseries they will bring on my descendants and my people!"

The prediction was but too truly fulfilled. But, in Louis the third, these bold invaders found more than their match and the most important relic of German poetry of this epoch, the latter end of the ninth century, is the "Ludwigs Lied", or hymn celebrating the victory won by Louis over the Normans at Saulcourt, composed by Herschell, a monk with whom the monarch was on terms of great intimacy. The style is concise and energetic, blending the triumphant emotions of the warrior, the monk had perhaps once wielded sword and lance, with the pious devotion of the recluse!

We append a few stanzas as specimens, translated almost word for word, although not in the rhythmical measure of the original.

I knew a king he was hight Lewis  
Faithful to God and he was rewarded.

He gave him servants  
 Pious and true,  
 And the throne here in France;  
 May he long sit thereon!

Lewis shares the kingdom with his brother Carlmnan and all goes wrong.

He let the heathen  
 Surprise and overwhelm them;  
 Nay more, let his Franks  
 Serve the base pagan!

He who was a robber  
 Seized on a fortress;  
 And from that hour  
 Was held as a nobleman.

One was a murderer,  
 Another a liar,  
 Another a traitor,  
 And bore him as such.

The monarch was maddened,  
 The realm was distracted,  
 Christ was indignant.

Then God took pity.  
 He knew all their sufferings,  
 And summoned king Lewis  
 To haste to the spot.

Then he took shield and spear  
 As forward he rode,  
 To avenge their suffering  
 And punish his foes!

He had not gone far  
Ere he found the Normans.  
God be praised, he cried!  
He saw what he wished.

The king rode on boldly,  
Singing high hymns;  
And all sang with him  
Kyrie Eleison!

The song is sung;  
The fight is begun!  
Blood rose to the cheeks  
Of the gallant Franks.

Each avenged his wrongs,  
None like King Lewis.  
Blessed be God!  
Lewis is victor;  
Thanks to the saints  
His is the victory!

Were we not confined within the limits of poetic literature, we should pause awhile to point out more than one monkish chronicle whose obscurity and tediousness are redeemed by great learning and curious detail. Nor was this erudition confined to the nobler sex. In the depths of her convent, the nun Hroswitha composed a history of Saints and female martyrs, nay more, theatrical pieces, some of which have reached us and which, though not entering precisely into our subject, being in Latin and in

prose are too interesting to be passed by without notice.

The abbey of Gandersheim, on the banks of the Ganda, was founded by Ludolf count of Saxony A. D. 859 and completed by his widow, who herself ended her long life beneath the shadow of its sacred walls at the age of one hundred and seven. It was about a century later that Hroswitha entered the convent to which she was destined to lend so much celebrity. In this pious retreat, as in many of those of the order of St. Benedict, the study of the great masters of antiquity was united to that of the fathers, and an attempt made to blend the graceful luxury of paganism with monastic severity. They were modelled probably upon the convent founded at Poitiers in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century by Radegunde, wife of Clotaire, when flying the husband who, after slaying her father and her race, had forced her to become his bride, she sought refuge at the altar and exchanged the hated diadem of the queen for the veil of the recluse.

In these retreats, the visits of learned men were not only permitted, but welcome.

Thus the courtly poet Fortunatus lingered long at the monastery of Poitiers, and ultimately taking orders, established himself in the neighbourhood, as priest of the metropolitan church in order to enjoy the society of the cloistered queen.

The picture of this friendship, at once so pure and so devoted, which consoled Radegunde for all her sorrows, and made Fortunatus forget alike the rude festivities of the barbarian courts and the disappear-

ance of the last vestiges of Roman civilization, has been traced by a master hand. (1)

Another French writer in his "Études sur l'antiquité" has drawn a picture alike graceful and fanciful of the fair nun who "thought she imitated Terence and heralded Racine"; of the church, "the sacred theatre of her triumphs, the long array of monks with their sable cowls, the noble ladies with their diadems of pearls and gems, the princes of the imperial court seated in the choir itself, and the crowd of artisans, serfs and vassals at the porch." (2)

Here indeed the gravest historian may allow a little scope to his imagination. A nun of twenty five, fervent, chaste and tender, imbued with the love of classic lore, comprehending to the full all its beauties while shuddering at its impurities, and longing to transfer the grace and tenderness of Terence to sacred legends and holy tales! We see her pacing with slow and uncertain step the silent cloisters, or the narrow alleys of the convent garden; watching the moon-beams as they streamed through the dark pines and spreading oaks, and debating within herself, whether it was permitted for a christian and a nun to devote, even her leisure hours, to profane, and above all, dramatic composition. Nay, when every scruple was silenced by the belief that the end would justify the means, when the dramas were fairly composed, serious difficulties remained to be overcome. Per-

---

(1) Recits des temps Merovingiens par Augustin Thierry.

(2) Etudes sur l'antiquité par Philarète Chasles.

mission must be obtained to perform them, either in the convent or the church adjoining, for, that they were meant to be performed, there can scarcely be a doubt. There are marriage ceremonies, baptisms, funerals etc. which, to be effective, must have been exhibited to view. We must not, however, measure the dismay of those to whom the proposal was made, by that which a similar idea would excite in our own days. At Constantinople itself, as early as the seventh century, songs, dancing and music mingled with the sacred rites, and long afterwards the "Fête de l'Ane" was celebrated in the cathedral of Rouen, while Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were flung into the fiery furnace, to the edification of crowded and pious congregations. All this, strange and profane as it appears to us, was in fact but an attempt natural to a people full of devout aspirations and ardent faith, but still struggling only out of barbarism, to give shape and form to those visions of spiritual things which occupied so large a portion of their thoughts.

The permission sought by Hroswitha, however, was granted, and then what excitement must have prevailed in that retreat on whose threshold the bustle of the world had till now died away! Those long drawn aisles, which had hitherto resounded only to the voice of prayer or praise, were to echo back the accents of earthly tenderness, the pleadings of guilty passion, the anguish of hopeless despair. Who can help regretting that no authentic record of these representations, and no portrait of the fair dramatist have reached us.

There are two ancient editions of Hroswitha's works, one printed at Nuremberg A. D. 1511. in a small folio volume by Conrad Celtes, or Conradus Celtius, a man of great learning and poet laureate to the emperor Maximilian, who had discovered it in an old monastery belonging to the order of St. Benedict; another, merely a reprint of the original at Wittenberg A. D. 1707 augmented by a biographical notice. It is divided into three parts; the first containing eight poems, or legends, and a fragment entitled *Panegyrum Oddonum* "or Panegyric on the Othos;" the second of six legends, all on sacred subjects, and six dramas the principal aim of which the authoress herself declares is the glorification of female chastity. "To effect this", says Mr. Magnin, "it was necessary that this virtue should be exposed to the most terrible perils." It is but just, however, to add, that the pen of the fair nun is always as chaste and pure, as her intentions are candid and irreproachable. (')

Of the dramas Gallicanus and Abraham are the most remarkable; the former for the brief but admirable delineation of the character of Julian the apostate, of which Mr. Villemain speaks in terms of such unqualified praise, and the latter by the feminine tenderness and true christian feeling which breathe in every line. In an age of ignorance and bigotry, a woman and a nun, had sense to feel and courage to declare, that true and heartfelt repentance

---

(<sup>1</sup>) *Oeuvres de Hroswitha traduits par Mr. Magnin.*

alone could win the mercy of heaven, and that the better Man understands the marvellous works of God, the more will he love and honour him.

We venture to translate a scene from Abraham in which the hermit, old and worn with fast and vigil, quits his retreat to reclaim his niece Marie who, after a youth of purity and prayer, has yielded to temptation, fled from her solitary home, and fallen into vice and infamy.

*Marie.*

There is a room where we shall be comfortable.

*Abraham (aside).*

It is time now to remove my large hat, and show who I am. (aloud), oh daughter of my adoption! oh better half of my soul! Marie, dost thou recognise me? Me, the old man who brought thee up with a father's tenderness and who affianced thee to the only son of the celestial king?

*Marie.*

Oh heavens! it is my father and my master Abraham.

*Abraham.*

Why didst thou despise, abandon me?

*Marie.*

How could I dare, soiled as I was, to approach your holy presence?

. .

*Abraham.*

To sin is human; what is diabolic is to persist in our sins. It is not he who falls by surprise who is to be blamed, but he who neglects the opportunity of rising from his fall.

*Marie.*

Wretched that I am! (throws herself on the ground).

*Abraham.*

Why this despair? why dost thou remain thus motionless and prostrate?

*Marie.*

I am struck with terror. I could not sustain the weight of your paternal remonstrances.

• • • • • • • • • • • • •

*Abraham.*

Is it not for thee I have quitted my beloved desert and renounced the observance of almost all regular discipline? Is it not for thee I have made myself the companion of the debauched and worldly? — I, a true hermit! Have not I, who for so long was vowed to silence, proffered jovial words to avoid recognition? Why cast down thine eyes? why disdain to exchange thy thoughts with me?

*Marie.*

The consciousness of my guilt weighs me down.

*Abraham.*

Thy sins are great, but the divine mercy is greater than all created things. Banish this sadness and profit by the little time still granted for repentance. For divine grace abounds most where abomination and disorders have most abounded.

*Marie.*

If I had the slightest hope of meriting my pardon I should not hesitate to devote myself with ardour to penitence.

*Abraham.*

Have pity my daughter on the fatigues to which I have exposed myself. Renounce this fatal discouragement, which is, I declare, more culpable than all thy faults; for he who despairs of God's mercy to sinners, commits an unpardonable sin. . . . . . . . In fact, as the spark which flashes from the pebble cannot set the sea on fire, so the bitterness of our sins can never change the sweetness of divine mercy.

The arguments and entreaties of the venerable hermit prevail. Marie returns with him to the retreat of her sinless girlhood, while Abraham, with a gentle care all the more touching from the severity of his own life, places her on his mule and follows on foot, lest the roughness of the road should hurt her.

Paphnuce is founded on a subject not very dissimilar; the conversion of the partisan Thaïs who expiates a life of guilt by consenting to be shut up in a narrow cell, whence she emerges only to die. The distinction between the tone adopted by Paphnuce towards her whose whole life had been one scene of profligacy, and that of Abraham towards Marie whose fall has been the result of weakness rather than vice, is most delicately drawn.

The exact date of Hroswitha's death is not known and it is only comparatively of late years that her works have attracted general attention. Bouterwerk indeed mentions them in his (1) "Geschichte der Poesie und der Beredsamkeit", but so briefly as to prove that he was little acquainted with her productions and our own historian Hallam acknowledges that he had never even seen them (2).

---

(1) *Geschichte der Poesie und Beredsamkeit.* Vol. 9th p. 70.

(2) *Literature of Europe in the middle ages.* Vol. 2d p. 9.

## CHAPTER VIII.

BRIEF HISTORICAL RESUMÉ. — THE OTHOS. — THE EMPERORS HENRY THE FOURTH, HENRY THE FIFTH. — THE "ANNO LIED". — "THE MEROGARTEN". — THE LOMBARD CYCLE VIZ: DUKE ERNEST, COUNT RUDOLPH, KING RUOTHER, KING ORTNIT, ST. OSWALD, ORENDEL, BITEROLPH, SOLOMON AND MOROLF.

SAVE the productions of Hroswitha, German poetry presents little worthy of attention during the first half of the tenth century. It might have been supposed that, on the restoration of peace to the distracted realm by the election of Conrad, Duke of Franconia, to the imperial dynasty, A. D. 911, literature would have partaken of the advantages of a more stable and regular government. But the continual attacks of the Magyars and Slaves left the Emperor little time for the internal improvement of his kingdom. Under his successor, Henry the Fowler, a brighter period seemed for an instant to dawn on literature; for how could a soul so chivalrous be insensible to the claims of poetry? But the spirit of song was not sufficiently ripe among his people; it was in his power to introduce jousts and tournaments, but not to call forth the love of minstrelsy which

was one day to animate them. Otho the 1<sup>st</sup>, the greatest sovereign of his age, the pacifier of Italy and Germany, the universally beloved and revered, contrived, amid all his cares and conquests, to devote some attention to the cultivation of literature. The moment indeed was favorable for such an attempt. The idea, then universal in all Christendom, that the year one thousand was to be the end of the world, had in some measure subdued even the fierce warriors of the tenth century, but scarcely had the fated moment passed away without bringing the threatened calamity, when they broke forth with redoubled violence (<sup>1</sup>).

The marriage of Otho the second, with the fair Theophania, daughter to Romanus, emperor of Byzantium, A. D. 972, did much to foster a love of classic lore; but both his reign and that of his unhappy successor Otho the 3<sup>d</sup> were too brief and troubled, to admit of their devoting any serious attention to national literature. When the latter perished at Rome in his twenty third year, by the slow and fearful vengeance of a deeply injured woman, who thus avenged the execution of her heroic husband and the outrages of which she herself had been the victim, Germany was again convulsed to its very foundations and, during the whole reign of Henry, Duke of Bavaria, and his immediate successors, the country was agitated by internal dissensions and baronial feuds. During the comparatively tranquil reign of Henry the third,

---

(<sup>1</sup>) Muratori Annali istorici.

indeed, a poem entitled “Merogarten” was written, by whom has not been ascertained. The style is rude, the rhythm harsh and, judging from the few fragments preserved, the loss of the rest is not much to be regretted.

The constant contentions with the see of Rome, then personified in the haughty and imperious Gregory the 7<sup>th</sup>, which extended over the whole reign of the erring but unfortunate Henry the 4<sup>th</sup>, sufficiently account for the neglect of poetic literature; yet at the commencement of that royal career, whose splendid dawn was to close in darkness so profound, in humiliation so heartrending, a man whose name is lost in the lapse of time, probably a monk, employed his studious leisure in the composition of a poem in honour of Anno, Archbishop of Cologne. This excellent prelate had acted as regent during the minority of Henry 4<sup>th</sup> and displayed both wisdom and resolution in his difficult task and, after relinquishing the reins of government, retired to his diocese where he devoted the rest of his life to works of piety and benevolence and died 1075, in the odour of sanctity.

But Saint Anno, though the principal, is by no means the only figure in this production, which preceded by more than a century the golden era of German poetry. The author passes in review the great men and important events of history, from the creation of the world to his own epoch.

But amid appreciations of human destiny, so elevated as occasionally to remind us of the pages of Salvien in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and herald those of Bossuet in the 17<sup>th</sup>, we discover the strangest prejudices

and historical errors, destined to be reproduced by all the chroniclers of the middle ages.

Here we find the tradition, so devoutly believed to this day in Padua, that the city owes its origin to the Trojan Antenor whose tomb, at the corner of one of the streets, is exhibited with proud complacency to strangers, and the still more extraordinary legend, long credited by the French themselves, that they are the descendants of another Trojan, Francus, who is said to have founded a new Ilion on the banks of the Rhine. Here too we trace those fabulous tales of Alexander the great, drawn probably from the Byzantine romance, the Pseudo-Calisthenes, to which we shall have occasion to refer hereafter.

Although we must venture to differ from the eminent writers who have declared "that this poem will secure its author an immortality of fame" (<sup>1</sup>), that it is a truly Pindaric song (<sup>2</sup>), and must confess that our appreciation of its merits is lower than that of a distinguished French professor who has honored it by translating it, word for word, in his interesting work "*Tableau de La littérature du Nord*", it cannot be denied that it possesses both vigour of touch and warmth of coloring, that the sentiments are pure and lofty and that more than one passage would not shame the productions of a far more poetic age. The dialect is still Frankish but shows a gradual approximation to the present high German.

(<sup>1</sup>) *Bouterwek's Geschichte der Literatur und der Dichtkunst*.

(<sup>2</sup>) *Hettner's germanische Blätter*. Vol. 5th. p. 169.

It was discovered and edited by Martin Opitz, 1639; a service to the literature of his country which should not be forgotten.

Some of the opening stanzas evince that love of nature and natural objects which still forms one of the characteristics of German poetry.

The moon and sun shone night and day,  
 The stars held on their destined way;  
 Frost and snow did their part perform,  
 So did the thunder and the storm;  
 The clouds their streams of water shed,  
 The rivers roll'd on in their bed.  
 The trees all decked themselves with flowers,  
 And green leaves clothed the woods and bowers;  
 The wild beasts lurk'd in their retreat,  
 The song of birds was very sweet,  
 And all God's holy laws obeyed,  
 Save the two best that he had made.

The reign of the detestable Henry the 5<sup>th</sup> was not much less agitated than that of his unhappy and injured sire, and we can discover no traces of literary productions save the "Kaiserchronik" a strange medley of history and legend in the merest doggrel, but possessing a certain interest from the insight it affords into the habits and manners of the age. (1)

After the death of Henry, the empire was again shaken to its very centre and even, when after years of civil strife, Lothario, Duke of Saxony, was proclaimed emperor by the common consent of

(1) Kaiserchronik edited by Goldman. Leipzig.

his rivals, Conrad and Frederic von Hohenstaufen, and peace awhile restored to the distracted kingdom, literature and the arts remained buried in profound slumber. The accession of Frederic himself and the comparative prosperity which, for fourteen years, Germany enjoyed beneath his sway, exercised a favourable influence on the mental as well as the physical condition of the people, and the glories and renown with which the celebrated Barbarossa crowned the name of Germany, roused some of the dormant energies of her sons.

During the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, German poetry may be said to have been in a state of transition. The old hymns, the half religious, half historical lays, had gradually lost their attractions; the reign of love and chivalry had not yet commenced. Something between the two, mingling the sober tints of the one with the vivid colouring of the other, is the lay or legend of Duke Ernest which together with certain other poetic traditions, King Ruother, Wolf Dietrich, etc. have been classed by a distinguished German critic under the head of the Lombard Cycle. The oldest MS. extant of Duke Ernest bears the date of 1191, and is still in the Frankish dialect; the hero of the poem is Ernest, Duke of Swabia, stepson to Conrad the 2<sup>d</sup> who had wedded Ernest's mother, Gisela. For some time, the young prince enjoyed the favour of his stepfather; but in consequence of his demanding the newly conquered kingdom of Burgundy in right of his mother, serious misunderstandings arose between them, and the hot headed youth formed a conspiracy against the emperor. Discovered, baffled and forced

to sue for mercy, he was forgiven at the intercession of his mother; but a second rebellion was visited with greater severity and the offender was kept in close confinement till the mediation of his step-brother, King Henry, obtained his pardon. Henry had soon reason to repent his generosity. Forgetful of all the indulgence shown him, Ernest again broke into open revolt. This time the emperor's patience was fairly exhausted. Ernest was placed under ban and forced to fly for refuge to the depths of the forests, where he supported himself and his followers by brigandage. Pursued, surrounded and out-numbered, he was slain after a desperate resistance and his band dispersed and taken. (1)

Here is evidently the foundation of our lay, the facts however being so overlaid with fiction as to be scarcely recognisable. Here we find Ernest, accused and calumniated by the Pfalzgraf Henry, revenging himself by attacking and murdering him, placed under ban, forced to fly the country, and taking up the cross to expiate his guilt.

There is a charming scene where Adelheid, the mother of Ernest, implores the emperor's mercy on behalf of her son; but, with this exception, the first part is dry and uninteresting. The second, on the contrary, is full of adventure and spirit-stirring scenes.

Ernest who, as we have seen, has betaken himself to the Holy Land, embarks for Constantinople and is shipwrecked near the Isle of Cyprus. There he beholds a stately castle surrounded by gar-

---

(1) See Otto Friesung Ch. 22.

dens of fairy-like beauty. He enters with his companions, expecting to find a numerous and splendid train of knights and nobles, but all is silent as the grave. The sumptuous halls are empty and desolate and no sound of human voice or human footsteps meets the ear. The wanderers console themselves with the hope that the spot is but temporarily deserted and, after bathing in a crystal stream that flows invitingly amid grass and flowers, they stretch themselves on the sumptuous divans and sink to rest.

Next morning they are startled by a strange unearthly sound and, hastening forth, they behold, to their amazement, a troop of gigantic Cranes with legs and beaks of a proportion which would have excited the envy of our friend the heron of Lafontaine, "au long bec emmanché d'un long cou", bearing with them a fair princess whom they have carried off from her home and kindred: of all the strange inventions of poetry or fable, the most grotesque verging, as it does, on the thoroughly absurd.

Ernest and his followers, true to their knightly duty, attack the plumed robbers who defend themselves with a valour for which their race, in general, is not celebrated, but, as may be supposed, they are worsted and the maiden is rescued, but dies of a wound received in the strife. The warriors hasten to leave this detestable spot which seemed so fair, and once more embark; but their ship is dashed upon a rock and remains transfixated there. All resign themselves to destruction; one after another perishes of hunger, till seven only remain. Ernest then proposes, as a last expedient, to sew themselves up in the

skins of beasts (how they got them we are not informed) and suffer themselves to be carried away by the Griffins who hover over them, and who, mistaking them for dead animals, would transport them to the woods to devour them; then they could easily tear aside their hairy covering and chase away the monsters. This extraordinary plan is successfully carried into execution.

So now behold our knights travelling through the air with a velocity which would leave all our newly discovered modes of locomotion far behind! The voyage is accomplished in safety; for the Griffins, congratulating themselves on the dainty regale that awaits them, take good care not to lose it by any carelessness of their own, and we may imagine their vexation on not only being balked of their promised repast, but finding the tables turned; for instead of breakfasting on the supposed animals, it is Ernest and his companions who breakfast on them. Then follow all sorts of strange adventures with giants and pygmies and one-eyed monsters till, at length, having subdued every enemy and vanquished every obstacle, the heroes return in triumph to their native shores, where Ernest, by his mother's advice, presents himself before the emperor, falls at his feet, implores and obtains forgiveness.

It is evident, that the Author of this strange narrative was acquainted with the *Odyssey*, as well as with many of the ancient geographical writers whose extraordinary stories he frequently reproduces. The study of the classics, introduced by the Roman conquerors and so warmly protected by Charlemagne, found favour in

the eyes of succeeding emperors, particularly in those of the Othos; Bruno, Archbishop of Cologne, brother to the first of the line spent large sums in inducing certain Greek professors and scholars to exchange the luxurious splendour of Byzantium for the comparative rudeness of a little German episcopal court of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Otho the 2<sup>nd</sup>, as we have seen, wedded a Greek princess and excited the jealousy of his subjects by surrounding himself with the countrymen of his wife, and the ill-fated Otho the 3<sup>rd</sup> was versed from childhood in the language of Homer.

We subjoin a few verses from the conclusion of the poem:

Then the warriors, bold in heart and hand,  
Returned once more to their native land.  
Dame Adelheid, the good and gay,  
Was in gracious mood that day;  
She listened to tales of prowess and war,  
By heroes who had come from afar.

Now when the hour of worship came,  
To the minster hastened the royal dame.

**E**rnest was already there,  
And then spoke the empress, pious and fair,  
Unto the lady near at hand;  
I see a lowly pilgrim stand,  
Who has come far o'er the sea:  
Lead him I prithee unto me.

**M**ass being over,  
The bishop in the monarch wrought  
Deep deep devotion and holy thought;  
Then Ernest pressed towards his seat  
And fell down humbly at his feet.  
What I did ill, he thus began,  
**O**h sire, forgive me wretched man!

The emperor spoke as moved by heaven:  
Amend thy life and be forgiven;  
Then by the hand he raised the knight, &c.

Of “Grave Rudolph”<sup>(1)</sup>, only a few fragments have come down to us; it appears to have been written about the year 1170, by a noble knight whose name is unfortunately forgotten. It gives many pictures of the crusades and sketches from the life of the celebrated Count Robert of Flanders, with descriptions of Palestine after its conquest by the Christians.

The poem of King Ruother belongs to the same period. It blends the wild legends of paganism with the more courtly tales of the thirteenth century. The subject is as follows.

King Ruother seeks the hand of the daughter of Constantine, Emperor of Byzantium who, indignant at his presumption, not only rejects the demand, but throws the luckless ambassadors into a dungeon. Ruother, on learning their fate, sets forth instantly to rescue them, accompanied by two giants of marvellous strength. Arrived at Constantinople, he presents himself under the assumed name of Dietrich and offers the emperor his aid in his quarrel with the King of Babylon. It is accepted; by his valour and address he secures the victory.

The princess is promised as his recompense; but the emperor, discovering the deceit practised on him, is so enraged, that the unlucky suitor is compelled

---

(1) *Grave Rudolph von Grimm herausgegeben.*

to fly. After a while, however, he returns, somehow or other obtains entrance into the palace, conceals himself under the table where the imperial family is assembled for their midday repast, and contrives to place in the princess's hand a ring which, by some mysterious means, makes known his presence: once more discovered, he is condemned to a cruel death, despite the tears and supplications of his promised bride. Arrived at the fatal spot, he draws out a horn concealed beneath his vestments, and blows a blast so long and loud that it reaches the ears of his two faithful giants; they fly to his rescue, disperse his enemies, and lead him away in safety. Hugh Dietrich may be regarded as a continuation of this legend. Son of King Angus of Constantinople, he hears tell of the beauty of a maiden, of the name of Hildeburga, who is confined by her father in a lofty tower and secluded from all male society. To obtain admission to her presence, Hugh hits on an expedient which would not easily occur, save to a lover. He disguises himself in female attire and, the better to play his part, acquires the arts of spinning, sewing and other female accomplishments; he then presents himself at the monarch's court and offers his services to perfect his daughter in every branch of female education and wile away her solitary hours. Delighted with so valuable an acquisition, the monarch admits Hugh to the presence of the fair captive. For twelve weeks he lingers by her side ere he discloses his sex, and then leaves her, promising a speedy return. But weeks and months pass on and he is seen no more. The princess at length is liberated by her

father and finds means of concealing the child of her fatal love in a neighbouring forest, leaving it to the mercy of beasts of prey and the fury of the elements. But the wild denizens of the woods have pity on the helpless babe and a Wolf nurses him, whence he derives his name. When after many long and weary years, Hugh is at last enabled by his father's death to confess his marriage and claim his bride, the fruit of their clandestine union is nowhere to be found. At length he is discovered and his sire hastens to acknowledge him as his heir. After his decease, however, the youth's brothers, born in legitimate wedlock, deprive him of his inheritance and drive him into exile. In vain does he seek to oppose their violence, at first by gentleness and then by force of arms. His little band of faithful vassals fall around him, and he is compelled to wander forth a fugitive and alone.

We will not attempt to follow Wolf through all his various adventures, till the legend merges itself into that of King Ornit, of which, as it is far more romantic and poetical, we will give a longer resumé. The lay of King Ornit, as well as those of the Horny Siegfried, Walter of Aquitaine, the Hugh or Wolf Dietrich and the Rosengarten, were arranged, with several others, in a collected form by Casper von der Rön in the Heldenbuch already mentioned.

Ornit, we are told, dwelt with his widowed mother at Lamparter, though where that kingdom may be the author does not condescend to inform us. Indeed, these old Rhapsodists had a special geography of

their own, and never troubled themselves about topographic difficulties. There were no critics then to level the shafts of their wit at their presumption or ignorance. Their lays were sung not read, and their hearers, still less learned than themselves, were not likely to detect their blunders.

Having arrived at years of maturity, Ortnit, not unnaturally, resolves on entering into the holy state of matrimony and summons his councillors to aid him in the choice of a wife, which he rightly feels is no light matter. When a variety of maidens, fair and noble, have been proposed and rejected, the king's uncle mentions a princess of surpassing beauty, daughter to Montebar, a heathen monarch, full of wile and cruelty; but the maid

Shines forth, mid other maidens, like gold of ruddiest hue  
 Amid pale lead or iron, believe me, it is true,  
 As the rose, mid other flowers, blooms in beauty rich and rare;  
 Ne'er was a maiden lovelier; she is good, they say, as fair.

The young king instantly determines on winning the lovely virgin, or perishing in the attempt, despite the remonstrances of his councillors and the entreaties of his mother.

Then mildly spoke his mother, that fair and noble dame;  
 Give up the thought; 'twill cost thee, thy kingdom, life and fame.  
 Thou first shouldst have consulted thy best and nearest friend,  
 What's done against a mother's will, hath rarely happy end.

Mother and gracious lady, replied the royal knight,  
 I beseech thee do not keep me from the proud and glorious fight.  
 I promise you obedience, what'ere else you may command,  
 But had I a thousand mothers, they should not stay my hand.

You've reared me with maternal love from a little helpless boy,  
 And so long as life is granted me, I'll seek to give you joy.  
 But now I must to Montebar, to win the maiden fair,  
 And never, never can I rest, till I have triumph'd there.

His mother finding all opposition unavailing, gives him a ring which has the magic power of protecting him in all perils. The king thanks, embraces her and sets off on his adventurous journey. The second day's march, he reaches a lovely meadow, gay with flowers and, amid the tender grass, sees the print of tiny footsteps. He follows their traces and at length finds himself beneath the shadow of a huge tree, where lies what seems a slumbering child.

It bore, upon its tiny form, garments so rare and bright,  
 Never was child of monarch more sumptuously bedight.

His robes were wrought with ruddy gold and jewels rich and rare  
 When alone, beneath' the linden tree, he saw that child so fair.  
 Alas! where is thy mother? said the king, that thou art here  
 Unguarded, unprotected: far from all who hold thee dear.

Thy garments are both rich and rare; how tranquil is thy sleep!  
 I've not the heart to wake thee from thy slumbers calm and deep.  
 Thy infant beauty doth my heart with nameless pleasure fill;  
 I fain would take thee for my son if it were heaven's good will.

So saying he takes him in his arms and is about to place him on his horse, when to his amazement, he receives from the seeming child so severe a blow as almost to deprive him of breath. In vain does the astonished monarch strive to hold him; he strikes right and left, declaring that he is not a child but a mighty king, whose crown is worth more than all

Ortnit's realm put together. The monarch however does not believe a word of it, and, his patience at last giving way, he threatens to kill him. This menace fails to frighten the little man; the more angry Ortnit grows, the more he laughs; but this scorn costs him dear. By the decree of fate he loses at once his magic power, and Ortnit who has flung him on the grass, is about to fulfill his menace when the tiny being, falling on his knees, implores mercy, promising his conqueror a suit of superb armour with helmet, sword and buckler of beaten gold, if he will but spare his life. Ortnit consents on condition that the dwarf, since he is indeed a king of power and might, will aid him in winning the princess of Montebar. Elberic, for so he is called, agrees, but requests permission to withdraw for the present, promising to return whenever his presence shall be needed; but Ortnit trusts him too little to let him out of his sight, despite his assurance that he can bring hundreds and hundreds of witnesses to his honor and integrity. Ortnit at length yields, and they are about to part, when Elberic entreats him to give him his ring as a token of remembrance. Ortnit at first refuses; but the little one's entreaties are so pressing that the king suffers him to draw the treasure from his finger; scarcely has he done so, when the dwarf becomes invisible! Ortnit is overwhelmed with despair:

Alas! he cries, where art thou? What has become of thee?  
No matter, cries the little one, no matter where I be.  
That thine eye could e'er discern me, that thine arm could lay me low,  
To this ring, and to this only, King Ortnit, dost thou owe.

Ortnit is not a little enraged; nor does he find much consolation in the dwarf's sarcastic observation, that it is not the first time, nor will it be the last, that "craft has prevailed where violence has failed".

In vain does he offer half the treasures he hopes to win, if Elberic will but restore the precious ring; the malicious little being only laughs at his entreaties, telling him he should have paid more heed to his mother's counsel, and asking him how he will face her anger: -- Ortnit declares he will gladly suffer whatever she is pleased to inflict. At length, the dwarf restores the ring and informs the astonished Ortnit that they are more closely connected than he has any idea of, for that he is his father.

Whatever Ortnit's private feelings might be on the occasion, he makes no observation and they part, the dwarf returning to his dominions, and Ortnit embarking for Montabor.

While pacing the deck of his vessel he suddenly perceives Elberic at his side.

Despite my tender love and truth, thy heart I have not won;  
Thou hast forgotten me; but I forget not thee, my son.

Ortnit entreats forgiveness, embraces the Elf and introduces him to his uncle King Roussen, though not apparently in his real quality. Arrived at Montabor Ortnit proposes to take advantage of the unprotected state of the castle to attack it, carry off the maiden, slay the king and all his followers. Elberic, however, rejects the proposal as unworthy a prince and a hero. Ortnit excuses himself, alleging that the Lord of Montabor is an impious heathen towards whom treach-

ery itself is admissible, but Elberic refutes the apology with arguments which prove how much better the laws of chivalry and honour were understood in fairy land, than on earth. Moreover, he offers to become his negotiator to the heathen monarch.

The Lord of Montabor is not a little amazed on receiving an ambassador from an unknown prince demanding the hand of his daughter, on pain of instant loss of his throne and kingdom, albeit the diminutive size of that ambassador does not seem to excite the slightest astonishment. He rejects the proposal with scorn, and commands the messenger to be seized and put to death; but Elberic has already disappeared.

Convinced that all conciliatory means will fail, Elberic now consents to open violence: the castle is stormed, but the assailants are driven back with slaughter. They then invest the place in due form and, taking advantage of an unguarded moment, renew the assault. Their impetuous valour carries all before it and the defenders fly on every side, leaving the princess to her fate.

Upon the hordes of heathens, the furious monarch pressed,  
The royal maiden wrung her hands and beat her lovely breast;  
From her fair head, in grief, she tore the long and silken hair,  
When she beheld the peril, and saw her friends' despair.

Then on her lap and bosom fell, the tears so big and bright,  
She trembled for her father's life, in that tremendous night,  
Her mouth was red as is the rose, and her two beauteous eyes  
Were like the moon in summer when midway in the skies.

She had crown'd with wreaths of roses her fair and virgin brow,  
 And bound her hair with noble pearls, but what availed it now?  
 She was of fitting height and shape, fair and slight to boot,  
 And straight as is a waxen torch, and fair from head to foot.

Her arms, her hands were beautiful in beauty and in grace,  
 Her nails were so transparent, one could see therein one's face.

The kind-hearted Elberic meanwhile has hastened  
 to the lady's apartments, where he finds her kneeling  
 before her idols in prayer.

Now say what message dost thou bring? exclaims the noble maid:  
 With mildness Elberic replies; in sooth t'is quickly said.  
 My master in yon heaven above, has sent me unto thee,  
 The sovereign of a mighty land, sweet princess thou shalt be.

Then thus replied the virgin; in this thou art deceived,  
 I will not quit the faith in which from childhood I've believed,  
 In that I'll live and perish, and say, where should I be  
 Save near the much lov'd parents who are all in all to me.

Elberic who seems a most devout elf versed in  
 all the mysteries 'of the Christian faith, does his best  
 to change her resolve.

Then to the trembling virgin, the dwarf thus wisely spake:  
 Wilt thou not gaze upon the strife, that's raging for thy sake?  
 This God himself commands thee, then listen to his call  
 Else in the feud wilt thou behold ere long thy father fall.

The virgin at length yields and sends her ring to  
 Ortnit, as a pledge of her faith. On receiving this  
 token, the conqueror bids the conflict cease and  
 hastens towards the palace, but is met on the way

by the dwarf leading the princess: Ortnit clasps her fondly to his bosom, and his aim being accomplished, returns to his native land, where the lady is baptized and they are married.

But the heathen monarch, as may be supposed, does not so easily forget the past, and vows revenge. Circumstances favour his designs; a hunter presents him with two dragon's eggs of great beauty, found amid the rocks and these he sends to Ortnit, with fair words and rich gifts, assuring him that, if carefully tended, they will produce two wondrous elephants who, in their turn, will bring forth precious stones of priceless worth. The king, unsuspecting of ill, accepts the fatal boon and the eggs are placed in a mountain cavern, where they speedily turn into two beautiful little serpents or dragons that, ere long, grow so fierce as to terrify their Keeper who, in his haste to escape, leaves the issue of the cave open and the monsters, rushing forth, spread death and desolation around.

The news at length reaches the king. Although monarchs are proverbially the last to hear of what is going on in their dominions, still it is difficult to conceive how Ortnit should have contrived to remain ignorant of the simple fact that the promised elephants had turned out to be serpents, but now, with true chivalrous spirit, he resolves to rid his country of the scourge he had innocently brought upon it. So, buckling on sword and armour, he prepares to set forth, despite the tears and entreaties of the queen, whose heart he had long since won by his devoted tenderness.

She clasped him fondly in her arms and gave him kiss on kiss;  
Oh! gracious Lord of Heaven, she cried, how sad a day is this!  
For thee I left my native land, for thee, my parents dear  
And all my heart most prized on earth, to follow thee, love, here.

Then thus replied King Ortnit: trust in the Almighty still,  
To him, do I commend thee and bow unto His will.  
But, whatsoe'er may be my fate of this assured be,  
That never yet was woman lov'd, as I, sweet wife, love thee.

Then bold as was the hero's heart, it melted at her fears,  
When he beheld her anguish, his eyes too filled with tears;  
And as the lovely lady to his heart her husband press'd,  
Both wept until their burning tears bedew'd each heaving breast.

Then, bursting from her embrace, the king rushes forth on his desperate enterprize. He has nearly arrived at the spot where the dragons generally lay, when a well-known voice arrests his steps. He turns and beholds Elberic who implores him to abandon his purpose and, on his persisting, warns him, at all events, to beware of yielding to slumber as, in that case, he will infallibly be devoured by the dragons, whereas if he resist it, he may yet prevail. Ortnit promises and, after a melancholy parting, pursues his way. But his terrible foes have concealed themselves in the clefts of the rocks and are nowhere to be discovered. Weary and sad, the king dismounts and, forgetting the dwarf's warning, sinks to sleep; a fatal slumber from which he is to wake no more, for the dragons, who have been watching their opportunity, emerge from their hiding-place and, seizing him, bear him off to their den and devour him; a *dénouement* painfully tragic and totally at variance with

the ordinary conclusion of these wondrous tales in which, as a general rule, the hero overcomes all his enemies and dies full of years and honours.

There are two manuscripts of the "Ortnit-Lied", one in the Vatican, the other in the Imperial library at Vienna. In both the usual German heroic metre of thirteen syllables is generally speaking, preserved; occasionally, indeed, we find four short-syllabled lines instead of two long ones, but it can scarcely be doubted that this has arisen from negligence on the part of the transcriber since, in this case the alternate verses only rhyme.

The same observation holds good of almost all the ancients lays we have noticed (<sup>1</sup>)

This poem, as well as the "Nibelungen", has been the subject of more than one admirable essay by Mr. Carlyle.

The poem of "Oswald", which belongs to the same period, resembles, in form and subject, that of "King Ortnit". Here too, the hero woos the daughter of a heathen monarch, cruel and inexorable as the Lord of Montabor, but the ambassador instead of an Elf is a raven, a bird held in high esteem by the Germans, both in the days of paganism and in the Middle Ages. Ravens, indeed, were long believed to be the souls of the deceased who, in this form, were permitted to revisit the scene of their earthly joys and sorrows, a superstition like many others, of eastern origin. (<sup>2</sup>)

(1) See *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, Billmar. p. 701.

(2) Grimm's *Mythologie*. Vol. 2.

Orendel is the legend of the holy coat of Treves, and is supposed to have been written by a monk of the name of Ottfried about the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In the Edda, there is mention of a certain Orendel, husband to the sorceress Grua, but he seems to have nothing in common with the hero of our poem.

It commences with a detailed account of Christ's death. How a pious Jew obtains the garment and flings it in the sea, having first placed it in a stone coffin, where it swims instead of sinking; how a Siren breaks open the coffin and the garment floats to shore; how it is found by a devotee who, thinking no harm, puts it on but, being speedily seized with dreadful pains, flings it back into the ocean where it is swallowed by a huge fish. The scene then changes to Treves, and we are introduced to Orendel himself who, having just received knighthood from his father King Rigel, reminds him it is time he should give him a wife.

His father knows of one only,

She is a queen and fair,  
Noble, with princely air;  
Of all her sex the pride; &c.

But, to win her, unheard of dangers must be encountered. A fleet is prepared: Orendel, with a numerous band of devoted followers, embarks on his distant enterprise. All sorts of calamities await him. His vessels are dashed on a rock; his followers perish; he himself with difficulty gains the shore, where he is found by a gruff old fisherman who, on his telling him he is of the same trade as himself, bids him

prove it by catching him a dozen fish directly. Orendel has never thrown a net in his life, but, with Heaven's good help, he succeeds so well as to win favour with the old man. On opening one of the fish, the holy garment is found therein and this garment, after a long and weary term of service, he at last obtains from his master, with permission to visit the sepulchre of the Redeemer. There he meets with new adventures, till, at length, the fame of his prowess reaches the ears of the princess he came so far to woo, who summons him to her court and declares her intention to make him her husband.

Her vassals enraged, rebel against her; but with the aid of her father David's good sword which she bestows on Orendel, and of three angels who come down from heaven for his special assistance, the rebels are vanquished and dispersed. The conqueror receives the hand of the fair queen as his recompence. But their troubles are not yet at an end. War breaks out with their pagan neighbours and, this time, the princess arms herself to fight beside her Lord.

Above her lovely breast she laid,  
A sword and buckler strongly made;  
And on that buckler, stout and good,  
Four splendid golden griffins stood;  
And then, to combat with her lord,  
She fastened to her belt her sword,  
Upon her head a helmet placed,  
With many a floating plume begraced,  
And bade th'attendant maidens lead,  
Before the court, her gallant steed  
With saddle all of ivory fair, &c.

Again they are victorious, but, on a subsequent occasion, Orendel is taken prisoner, and thrown into a dungeon. His wife marches to his succour with an army of thirty thousand men. For six months, they besiege the castle but in vain. At last a dwarf, in the enemies' interest, leads the queen to the place of her husband's confinement, with the intention of betraying her into their hands, but is forced by an angel to release both.

After this Orendel has sundry other adventures, in all of which he is aided by his gallant and devoted wife and, at length, as the reward of their courage and virtues, they are removed together to a better world.

The versification of Orendel is extremely rude, but the action is well sustained and the character of the queen herself presents that union of heroic devotion and feminine tenderness, in the delineation of which the poets of the middle ages delight. (1)

Solomon and Morolf, a poem of the same epoch, need not detain us long. It is an attempt of the burlesque but has very little either of wit or drollery.

Morolf, an ugly and misshapen dwarf, after holding a wordy war with Solomon, King of Judea, in which both rain proverbs with pitiless profusion, plays him sundry tricks, some not of a very decorous character, and is condemned to be hanged by the incensed

---

(1) Orendel first published in 1844 by von der Hagen from the original MS. dated 1477.

monarch, with permission, however, to choose the tree from which he would be suspended.

This clause saves him; he wearis out his executioner in seeking his tree, and obtains his pardon. Both Orendel and Solomon and Morolf have been translated into modern high German by the indefatigable Carl Simrock, 1845.

---

## CHAPTER IX.

THE CRUSADES. — THEIR INFLUENCE IN GERMANY. — LOVE AND MARRIAGE IN THE DAYS OF CHIVALRY. — PECULIAR CHARACTERISTICS OF GERMAN MINSTRELSY. — MANNERS OF THE TIMES. — FIRST GERMAN MINSTREL. — THE EMPEROR HENRY THE 6TH. — HENRY OF BRESLAU. — FREDERICK VON HAUSEN. — THE EMPEROR FREDERICK THE 2D AND PIERRE DES VIGNES. — THE *ÆNEID* OF VELDECKE. — CONRADIN, LAST OF THE LINE OF HOHENSTAUFEN. — JACOB VON DER WARTE. — WALTER VON DER VOGELWEIDE.

We have lingered, perhaps too long, amid the heroic lays and legends of Germany in the olden time. Now, we must transport ourselves and our readers into the very heart of less rude and still more romantic age, the days of the minnesingers or minstrels of the north. Germany had been brought into contact with Provence, about the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and many emperors of the house of Hohenstaufen had sought to establish their dominion in that favoured land.

Frederick Barbarossa was crowned king there in 1133. Otho the 4<sup>th</sup> appointed a lieutenant to govern in his name and this political intercourse could not but lead to literary communication, as many of the

Troubadours, allured by the hope of preferment and honour, thronged to the Court of the Swabian emperors. (<sup>1</sup>) The result was quickly apparent in German literature; the national traditions to which it had been hitherto limited, were gradually exchanged for a new description of poetry, moulded on the love songs of the troubadours, the tales of the round table and the exploits of Charlemagne. A greater contrast can scarcely be conceived than that which exists between the wild irregular grandeur, the fierce energy, the superhuman proportions of the Nibelungen and Grudune and the narrow range, the artificial structure, and almost feminine delicacy of the minnesingers. We need scarcely be told that they but echo the lays of another clime.

It was amid the olive groves and vines of Provence that the love songs, the purely romantic strains of the middle ages, burst into life and bloom.

The comparative security from war and pillage enjoyed by that fair land for nearly two hundred years, when the rest of Europe was distracted by foreign invasions and civil feuds, had developed the poetic tendencies of its people and, while their bright sun and azure skies lent their lays those vivid hues for which they are so remarkable, the martial spirit of the age, the conflicts and triumphs in which their warriors bore a part, breathe forth in every line, like the stirring blast of the trumpet amid the soft music of lyre and lute.

The tone of German minstrelsy is at once more tender and more subdued, impressed with a certain

---

(<sup>1</sup>) Fauriel, *Hist de la poésie provençale*.

vague and dreamy melancholy. Of war and combat, of feudal pride and feudal hatred there is scarcely a trace. There is none of that longing for battle and renown which kindles the verse of Bertrand de Born. The influence of the Crusades, indeed, is clearly apparent in Provençal poetry. True, but a small portion of the Troubadours really set out for Palestine; the greater part infinitely preferred the groves and bowers of Provence to the burning sands of the East. But the recital of the gallant exploits of Godfrey de Bouillon and his companions in arms, inflamed the imaginations even of those who had no inclination to join them, and inspired their song.

But in Germany, the Crusades never roused the enthusiasm either of prince or people. Conrad the 3<sup>d</sup> joined them only at the pressing entreaties of St. Bernard, and the humiliating termination of that ill-fated enterprise was not calculated to render the cause popular among his subjects. The second was still more disastrous, for it cost the life of their most renowned sovereign. Frederick Barbarossa perished in the midst of his triumphs, and the sole advantage derived by the Germans from this expedition was the institution of a new order of knighthood, the Teutonic knights of St. Mary of Jerusalem. (1) In the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Crusades, the Germans, as a nation, took no share. In the 6<sup>th</sup>, Frederick the 2<sup>nd</sup>, whose quarrels with the Papal See occupy so large a space in the annals of his reign, played a prominent part and the treaty he entered into with the Sar-

---

(1) Muratori, Annali istorici. Vol 8th. p. 42.

cens by securing to the Christians possession of the Holy City and of a considerable portion of Palestine for ten years, effected more than all the arms of the Crusaders had hitherto accomplished. But the hatred of the Pontiff Gregory the 9<sup>th</sup> which pursued him alike in his hereditary dominions and under the walls of Jerusalem, prevented his carrying out his plans to their full extent, and forced him to return precipitately to Europe (<sup>1</sup>).

From this period till the year 1274, when the last vestige of Christian power was swept away from Syria, the Germans remained uninterested spectators of the contests still occasionally waged for the recovery of the holy Sepulchre, and their intestine divisions, while distracting the empire and impeding the progress of arts and civilization, offered no inspiration to their muse.

Their minstrels' only themes are love and nature, the bright eyes of their mistresses, the golden tints of autumn, the snows of winter and, in consequence, there is a monotony in their lays which all their sweetness of versification and freshness of imagery cannot redeem.

The minnesingers, with rare exceptions, belonged to the order of knighthood. Their duty was to protect the feeble, to defend the oppressed. Every knight had his lady-love who was, in most cases, the wife of another. So universally indeed was this usage recognised, that the husbands generally acquiesced without any difficulty and, in their turn, benefitted by the privilege. In a Provencal

---

(<sup>1</sup>) Muratori. Annali istorici.

romance, *Philomena*, composed, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, by a monk whose name has not come down to us, Oriunde, the wife of the king Matran, besieged in Narbonne by the army of Charlemagne, chances to see the Paladin Roland and they become enamoured of each other. In consequence, Oriunde most unpatriotically rejoices in the success of the foe and, to the just reproaches of her husband that her delight is the result of her love for Roland and that one day she will be punished for it, she replies "Seigneur, occupy yourself with your wars and leave me and my love. It does not dishonour you since I love so noble a chevalier as Roland, nephew to Charlemagne and with chaste affection." Matran, having heard this, retired quite discomfited and abashed. (1)

All husbands, indeed, were not quite so accommodating. The Count de Limousin, for instance, not only banished Bernard Count de Ventadour from his court and kingdom, on discovering his amorous devotion to his wife, though we are assured it was perfectly innocent, but actually shut up the poor lady in her chamber where he kept her close prisoner for a considerable time. But such instances of exaggerated scruples seem to have been the exception not the rule.

That the choice of a knight or a lady-love was regarded as an affair of no ordinary importance, is attested by the ceremonies with which it was every where accompanied.

---

(1) *Histoire de la poésie provençale.* Vol. 1st. p. 103.

The knight kneeling down before his lady, swore to serve her faithfully till death, while the fair one accepted his services, vowed truth and devotion, presented him a ring and then, raising him, imprinted a chaste kiss on his forehead. Although it was in France and above all in Provence that these singular customs took their rise, the Germans, as we shall see, were not long behind their neighbours in romantic gallantry.

Of course marriage was reduced to a mere material necessity, with which love was deemed absolutely incompatible.

To what strange anomalies this system gave rise, may be imagined; a lady promised one of her adorers to accept him for her knight, if the other, to whom she was sincerely attached, was lost to her. Having, however, married the object of her affection and, happening to love him still although he had become her husband, she was somewhat embarrassed when his rival claimed the fulfilment of her engagement and refused to listen to his suit. But Eleanor of Poitiers, to whom the case was referred, decided it against her, alleging she had really lost her lover, by accepting him as her lord. (1)

The German minstrels do not seem to have been divided into two classes, troubadours, and jongleurs, as was the case in Provence.

So far as we can learn, they sang their own compositions, though, when wealthy, they were always

---

(1) *Histoire de la poésie provençale.* Vol. 5th. p. 507.

attended by a younger companion, of inferior rank, to carry the harp and prepare the strings.

Nobility and knighthood were not necessarily synonymous, as the latter was frequently bestowed for deeds of prowess or good service on men of humbler birth.

The sons of the poorer nobility were placed as pages in the service of the wealthier barons, where they attended at table on their lord and lady, followed them to the chase, and performed all the offices appertaining to their condition. Pages, indeed, play a very prominent part in all tales and poems of the middle ages. Wolfram von Eschenbach frequently makes mention of them, and Gawain and Gamuret had always a train of beautiful boys who followed them.

The system of education of the noble youth of the middle ages is so well known as to render all details superfluous, but it must be remembered that it was, generally speaking, confined to knightly exercises to which was frequently added some instruction in the art of touching the minstrel lute. As to the vulgar accomplishments of reading and writing, they were abandoned to the clergy or to clerks and scribes who committed to paper the poetic lucubrations of the warrior bards. It seems more than doubtful whether Wolfram von Eschenbach could sign his name, and Ulric von Lichtenstein was forced to keep a letter from his lady-love in his bosom for ten days, till he could find some one to decipher it: kings themselves, despite a few brilliant exceptions, were not much more learned, and the heroic John of Bohemia, the hero of Mühldorf, the most chivalrous monarch of the age, to

whom all the cities of Italy offered their spontaneous homage, could not read even his breviary.

Knighthood, we know, was regarded as the highest of terrestrial honors. The pure spirit of chivalry, indeed, became rapidly tainted by the follies and vices of the age, and the tendency of the human mind to exaggerate whatever it adopts. But it cannot be doubted that it acted most beneficially on society at large. On woman, in particular, it conferred infinite benefit. If the influence of Christianity, little understood and less practised, had at its first introduction displaced her from the comparatively elevated position she occupied among the Germanic tribes, chivalry repaired the wrong by replacing on her brow the aureole with which ancient superstition had crowned it, and purifying while it replaced. She had been held as a being of inferior mould, at least in all domestic relations; she was now invested with almost divine attributes and, although it was only the nobly born who came within the immediate range of knightly romance, its influence extended more or less to the whole sex.

As love was the one great prevailing theme of their lays, the German minstrels, not content with celebrating it in every conceivable manner, personified the passion. "Frau Minne" assumed the place assigned among the Greeks to Venus pudica, and every true knight was bound to have beheld the Goddess in his sleeping or waking dreams.

The more voluptuous deity who, among the ancients, presided over the pleasures of the senses, had likewise her representative, though the Venus of the middle ages had little in common with the Grecian divinity of

love and beauty. Like the rest of the Goddesses of antiquity, Christianity metamorphosed her into a demon, gifted with superhuman charms only to lure to destruction the souls of those who bowed to her spells. Her favorite haunt was believed to be the interior of the Horselberg, one of a chain of mountains near Eisenach in Thuringen and called in common parlance the "Venusberg." Here she held her court, and the wild triumphant notes of mirth and music often pierced the rocky walls and caught the ear of the traveller on his lonely way. It was on this superstition, which seems to have obtained a certain degree of credit in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, that the well known legend of Tannhäuser is founded. Lured by the ravishing strains, the knight, within whose breast already slumbers the lust for sinful pleasure (for over such alone can the Goddess exercise dominion), follows the entrancing sounds and finds himself, he knows not how, in the enchanted hall where, on a couch sparkling with gems, lies Venus, bathed in rosy light, while around her nymphs and fauns and satyrs dance in wild and noisy revelry.

There the knight lingers for a whole twelvemonth till, wearied with the never varying round of sensual delights, he contrives to effect his escape and return to the court of Thuringen. Here, however, he finds himself shunned by all his former companions in arms as a being accursed and, at length, roused to the full sense of his guilt and misery, sets out on a pilgrimage to Rome to implore absolution. But prayers and penitence are alike in vain. For guilt like his there is no pardon and he is driven back to despair and perdition.

Despite their love songs and adventures, the life of minstrel knights in the 12<sup>th</sup> century was not exempt from moments of ennui. In summer it was delightful enough to pour forth sweet lays in the bright dewy mornings or soft shadowy evenings in ladies' bowers; to wander from castle to castle and fête to fête, admired, courted, flattered. All this must have been the very ideal of poetic bliss. But when winter came, the long cold dreary winter of the north, with its ice and snow and hurricanes, the case was widely different. The minstrels then had to work hard to prepare new lays for the approach of spring; shut up in their own abodes, many of which perched on the very summit of some almost inaccessible rock, exposed to every wind of heaven, must have offered no very agreeable residence, at least at that season. True, in the castles of the wealthier nobility, nothing that the skill of the age could effect in promoting comfort, was wanting; yet the chairs and sofas, though richly carved, were generally speaking cushionless and would seem strangely hard to a modern belle. The beds, on the contrary, were peculiarly soft and downy, though so high, that they could be reached only by a flight of steps. The curtains and coverlids were, in general, of silk embroidered by the fair hands of the lady or maidens of the castle. The rest of the furniture of the sleeping room consisted in a small and narrow mirror above the huge chimney piece, a few chairs, a table and a kind of bureau, with very small inconvenient drawers, but usually of ebony and often inlaid with ivory, silver, or mother of pearl. The repasts were numerous and abundant.

The table was covered with a white cloth and adorned with flowers and, both before and during the repast, basins of water and napkins were handed round as among the ancient Greeks and Romans; that the guests might wash their hands, a ceremony which the want of forks rendered indispensable. Among the poorer classes “Gerstensaft”, barley mead, or beer was the ordinary beverage: but the rich drank wine of various descriptions, flavoured with spices, and the immense size of the goblets preserved in some of the castles of Germany, attests the depth of their libations.

The total absence of all places of public entertainment, save in some of the larger towns, rendered the duties of hospitality incumbent upon every knight and nobleman. The only mode of travelling was on foot or on horseback, save indeed when the snow lay deep on the ground. Then about the 15<sup>th</sup> century, at least, sledges were sometimes used. When the guest entered the castle hall, he was met by the lady who, greeting him courteously, aided him to lay aside his cumbrous armour and presented him with rich attire. A draught of generous wine was then offered and the bath prepared. When he departed, he was accompanied to his steed by his entertainer and his wife or daughters, and fair hands gave the parting cup (<sup>1</sup>).

It is with regret that we find ourselves compelled to refer the first lyric poem of Germany to one so unworthy as Henry the 6<sup>th</sup>, the son of the great Barbarossa. If this perfidious prince, whose base

---

(1) *Ritterzeit und Ritterwesen von Büsching.* Leipzig 1823.

and faithless conduct towards the widow and orphans of the gallant Tancred have left an eternal stain upon his memory, be indeed the author of the charming little romance attributed to him, it must have been in his younger and better days, ere the lust of power and deep rooted habits of dissimulation and falsehood, had destroyed every spark of generosity and frankness.

### TO MY BELOVED.

I greet with many a lay the sweet,  
 Whom shun I neither will nor may,  
 Whom with my lips, I fain would greet,  
 I have not dared for many a day.  
 Whoe'er may breathe unto her ear  
 The strain I sing so fondly here  
 Be it man or maid, greet her to me so dear.

Both sea and land my will obey,  
 When I am by the loved one's side;  
 But when from her I'm torn away  
 Gone are alike my power and pride.  
 Sorrow and grief are then my store,  
 At times I'm glad, but soon tis o'er:  
 'Twill kill me this disdain from her whom I adore.

And though so fondly I'm inclined,  
 And, without flattering, ever bear  
 Both in my heart and in my mind  
 My lady's image pure and fair;  
 What does love give to soothe my moan?  
 A moment is her favour shown:  
 Rather than lose her love, I'd lose my throne.

Among the earliest minstrels of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, are Spervogel and Wernher von Tegernsee; the verses of the latter, though but rude and very little deserving the name of poetry, are full of high devotional feeling.

Great and endless is his might,  
Who was born on Christmas night;  
Christ is the subject of my lays,  
To whom all beings homage raise.

In Heaven, a glorious mansion stands,  
A house that is not made with hands;  
A pathway paved with gold is near,  
Pillars of whitest marble rear. etc.

Far superior both in style and matter is Henry von Veldecke. His epic poem the *Æneid*, which he probably regarded as the basis of his fame, deserves mention only as proving the revival of the love of classic lore in Germany, towards the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

It was nearly completed when the Count von Schwarzberg, to whom in the pride of authorship Veldecke confided his treasure, actually purloined it in order, it is said, that he might have the opportunity of perusing it at all hours without interruption, and nearly nine years elapsed ere the entreaties or commands of Hermann, successor to Louis, the Landgrave of Thuringen, induced him to restore it. The *Æneid*, like most German compositions of that day, was moulded, not on the Latin, but on a French imitation (<sup>1</sup>) and its deviations from the original are at once striking and amusing. There is an attempt to

---

(<sup>1</sup>) „Le roman d'Enée” in the collection of the MS. of the imperial library published by Mr. Paulin Paris.

graft the spirit of the romance of the middle ages on the classic elegance of the Latin poem but with so awkward a touch as to leave very little trace of either. In the siege of Troy, Hector's death is passed by almost in silence; the exquisitely touching scene with Andromache is dispatched in a few dry words; but there is a long description of the bed to which Dido leads Eneas; of its coverlid, the downy softness of its cushions, while there is no mention of the anguish of the hero at the destruction of his country and his home. On the other hand, the love scenes, though occupying too great a space and very unlike those of Virgil, have a value of their own, as giving a correct idea of "wooing and winning", not indeed in the days of ancient Greece, but of Germany in the middle ages.

Although Veldecke's language is the same as that of his predecessors, the low German, which was then the prevailing tongue, he may claim the merit of having introduced greater harmony and correctness of metre.

Frederick von Hausen contemporary with Veldecke was so engrossed by the tender passion as to be insensible to all around him, continually saying "good night", for "good morning", and occasionally putting on his doublet the wrong side outwards. He sang his lady's charms in the most pathetic strains, but in vain; at length, in despair, he took up the Cross and accompanied Frederick Barbarossa to the Holy Land where, by deeds of high emprise he made her name renowned through Palestine. For a moment she seemed touched by his devotion, but soon relapsed into her former coldness and indifference,

while he poured forth his anguish in lines more plaintive, it must be owned, than poetical, save one which contains a charming image:

This sad heart is as a cloister'd cell  
Where none but she  
May enter, and no form save her's may dwell.

Frederick von Hausen never returned. He died on the battle field in 1190.

The reign of Frederick the 2<sup>nd</sup> may be regarded as the golden period of poetry in the middle ages.

Then flourished those minstrels of whom the nation is so justly proud; Walther von der Vogelweide, Gottfried von Strasburg, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Hartmann von der Aue (of these three we shall speak in another chapter), Ulrich von Lichtenstein, and Jacob von der Warte. Frederick himself was a poet of no mean eminence though the only verses of his which have reached us, consist in a charming ballad in the Provençal dialect. The harmonious language of Oc had already attained a high degree of perfection, while that of Germany was but just struggling out of barbarism. Accustomed from childhood to the sweet accents of the former, it is not wonderful that the latter should have sounded harsh and unmusical to the monarch's ear.

No character has been the subject of opinions more diverse than that of Frederick, according as those who judge him are friends or enemies to the pretensions so haughtily urged by the Papal see. It is certain, however, that in intellectual refinement and mental attainments, he was decidedly the most distin-

guished man of his age; the first in all knightly accomplishments, speaking with equal elegance and facility six languages. Despite the sanguinary contests in which he was perpetually engaged, he found time to improve the laws and soften the manners of his people both Italians and Germans, to build universities and to encourage the study of the Classics. (1) The fate of Pierre des Vignes, indeed, is a terrible stain on his memory, but we must remember the cruel position in which Frederick was placed, surrounded by doubtful friends and secret enemies. His life had just been menaced by a conspiracy which, but for the timely remorse of one of its members, would, in all human probability, have effected its criminal aim. Who then can wonder that even his noble nature should have become clouded with doubt and suspicion, till, in a fatal moment, he lent credence to the insinuations of his courtiers, long jealous of the talents of the chancellor and of the favour he had enjoyed?

After all, the question of Pierre's guilt or innocence has never been satisfactorily settled. (2) One thing is certain that, the night before pronouncing the cruel sentence, Frederick was heard pacing his room with rapid and uneven steps, exclaiming in accents of the deepest anguish, "miserable that I am! What a man am I about to punish."

The young and gallant Conradin, whose cruel fate has affixed so indelible a stain to the memory of his murderer, Charles of Anjou, likewise touched the

---

(1) Geschichte der Hohenstaufen von Raumer. p 91.

(2) Muratori Annali istorici. Vol. 9th.

minstrel harp. A few verses of his composition have come down to us which we are induced to present our readers, rather from the interest which attaches itself to the author than from any intrinsic merits of their own.

I joy to see the lovely flowers.  
Brought back in this sweet month of May;  
Winter had robbed the groves and bowers  
But now they shine forth, bright and gay.

But oh! what joy can that impart,  
With all its days, so long and bright,  
While she who reigns in this sad heart  
Denies to bless me with her sight!

With Conradin was extinguished the house of Hohenstaufen, that house which, from comparative obscurity, had raised itself with such rapidity and success to imperial greatness and worldwide celebrity, which had reigned supreme over the mistress of the ancient world and planted its victorious standards on the burning sands of Palestine. In the little village of Waschenbeiwern in Swabia, the traveller, whose steps chance to roam to that sequestered spot, may yet behold the ruins of the humble tower that served as cradle to this haughty race, which soared so high only to close in darkness and humiliation; its two last scions perishing, one in the early bloom of youth on a scaffold, victim to a ruthless invader, (1) the other after years of weary though splendid captivity in the prisons of Bologna. (2)

(1) Conradin, 1268.

(2) Hensius, Frederick the 2d's illegitimate son He had been taken prisoner by the Bolognese who refused all the splendid offers made by his father to obtain his release; he died a captive in 1272.

The period of this dynasty forms, on the whole, the most brilliant in German annals. It is, in fact, the culminating epoch of the history of the middle ages, the moment in which the inhabitants of the north, while still retaining much of the fierce energies and hardy valour of their ancestors, became softened by the influence of a purer and loftier enthusiasm and, losing the grossness and barbarism which had hitherto characterised them, adopted the tone of more favoured climes. This poetry, indeed, was such as might have been expected from the age to which it belonged; an age in which romance and reality were so closely entwined as to form the web and woof of life; when the warrior, his sword yet wet with the blood of the vanquished, went forth, harp in hand, to pour out his lay before his lady's bower, or in the tourney (the mimicry of noble war) to maintain the supremacy of her charms; when kings themselves did not disdain to practise "the gaie science", and the same hand that held the sceptre or wielded the battle axe, delighted in striking the lute, the sole art, as we have already observed, held worthy a warrior and a knight.

It is impossible and, were it possible, it would only serve to weary the reader, to give a detailed account of the one hundred and sixty minnesingers whose names have been handed down to us. Many have probably been lost for ever; many more would have perished but for Roger Manesse of Zurich, councillor of that city, himself a member of the craft, who, about the year 1300, collected the scattered songs of his predecessors and transcribed them, with his own hand,

in one vast volume which remained for many years in the family of Manesse. It was afterwards given to the Elector Palatine and thence, during the thirty years' war, it was transported by unknown hands to the National Library of Paris where it still remains.

Germany, herself, seems to have cared little for these first flowers of her literary soil. Immersed in the study of the classics, she looked with contempt on the rude productions of a romantic age. But, at length in 1646, professor Bodmar of Zurich and professor Schulze, whose attention had long been directed to the national poetry, published them with explanatory notes (<sup>1</sup>), and they have since been reproduced in "von der Hagen und Büschings Lieder des Mittelalters."

Jacob von der Warte, though less celebrated than some of his contemporaries, has left us many very pleasing little strains:

1.

Hark, the little birds are singing,  
Merrily o'er mead and vale;  
Lays of grateful praise are ringing,  
From the daintie nightingale.

Look upon the dewy brae,  
On the heath with wild flow'rs bright.  
See how gaily they're bedight,  
By the bounteous hand of May.

---

(<sup>1</sup>) Bodmar's Ausgabe der Manessischen Sammlung. Zürich 1758.

## 2.

Many a pretty little flower  
 Laughs out from the sweet May dew,  
 In the sunshine, hill and bower  
 Don their very gayest hue.

What shall soothe my bosom's care?  
 What shall comfort me, I trow!  
 She with whom, I fain were now,  
 Will not listen to my prayer!

## TO MAY.

May, comes with its beauties rare  
 In the meadows every where;  
 One hears little birdies singing;  
 Sweet and joyous is their lay.  
 Countless flowers, bloom bright and gay,  
 Thro' the tender grass upspringing!  
 In the spring time we'll rejoice  
 And the gladsome news it sends;  
 Would she on whom my bliss depends,  
 Cheer my heart with her dear voice!

Walter von der Vogelweide is a poet of greater importance. He was born A. D. 1167, where, is not determined, but it seems tolerably sure that a considerable portion of his life was spent in Austria.

To infinite grace and tenderness, Walter unites energy and vigour. He did not confine himself to the usual themes, praises of his lady, of the Virgin, of the beauties of spring, or the glories of summer; but strung his harp to a loftier key. He sang of the duties of the emperor; he called upon the German people to maintain their ancient renown for truth

and honour. Firm in his allegiance to the line of Hohenstaufen, the fate of the last scion of that noble race struck him to the heart, and lent to many of his latter lays a tone of sadness which does not seem natural to his muse.

It has been said that Walter was employed in some public functions by the Emperor Henry the 6<sup>th</sup>, but for this assertion there do not appear any adequate grounds. About 1216, he seems to have spent some time at the court of Louis the husband of that fair and pious Elizabeth whom succeeding ages have canonized. His last productions are dated 1225. A version of his poems, translated in the modern German tongue, appeared in 1832 by Dr. Carl Simrock, and an admirable essay on the same subject, by the well known and charming poet Uhland; and Tieck has included many of the lays in his "Lieder aus der Schwäbischen Zeit". Walter died at Würzburg in Bavaria and was buried in the gardens near the minster lately erected. Here stands a tree, beneath whose shade he loved to wander harp in hand, amid whose branches nightingales were wont, it is said, to assemble to listen to the sweet strains with which he would enliven his solitary rambles. In acknowledgement perhaps of these tokens of admiration, the poet bequeathed a legacy to the feathered warblers, ordering holes to be pierced in the stone that covered his remains, in which crumbs were to be daily strewed for their repast. For many years this bequest was punctually executed, and the nightingales evinced their gratitude by pouring forth their melody upon the tomb of their benefactor.

But in process of time, the churchwardens to whom the duty was confided and who probably had very little taste either for music or poetry, began to think the bread would be better bestowed on themselves than on the birds, and ceased to afford the accustomed repast. Indignant at this breach of faith, the nightingales forsook the spot and the warblings, with which they were wont to cheer the solitude and silence of night, have been heard there no more.

The following translations afford some idea of Walter von der Vogelweide's strains.

### I.

To me it chanced, as to a wayward boy,  
 Who seeks in vain the charming face to clasp  
 Which in the glass he sees, with eager joy,  
 Until the mirror breaks within his grasp;  
 Then all his joy is turned to woe and pain.  
 E'en so I dreamed that bliss would be mine own,  
 When I sought my sweet lady, but in vain;  
 Much grief from that fond love  
 And only grief I've known.

### II.

#### 1.

Both pure and beauteous is my ladye fair  
 And chaste and lovely as the lily white;  
 Her breath is balmy as the perfumed air,  
 Her eyes are like the sky on summer's night:  
 The strawberry is not redder than her lip,  
 Would I were but a bee, its dewy sweets to sip !

#### 2.

When in her bower, to lyre or lute she sings,  
 The nightingale doth hush her wonted strain;  
 The falcon rests upon his outstretched wings  
 And hovers listening o'er the grassy plain.

In all she does, there is so much of grace,  
I know not which most sweet  
Her music or her face.

## 3.

Her beauty thaws my heart, e'en as the sun  
Thaws ice and snow; but oh! not unto me,  
Doth she show forth her beams! she is not won  
By sigh, or prayer, or tuneful melody:  
And yet I've loved her from a little child,  
And sum up every hour, that she on me hath smiled.

## 4.

What boots it, that all others greet my lays  
With loud applause! that ladies fair and bright,  
List to my song! I only seek her praise,  
I only seek to shine in her dear sight:  
Star of my solitary heart! look down  
And soothe my bitter woe, or kill me with thy frown.

---

## CHAPTER X.

ULRICH VON LICHTENSTEIN. — CONRAD VON WÜRTZBURG. — THE TROJAN WAR. — THE MINSTREL WAR ON THE WARTBURG. — NITHARD AND FRAUENLOB.

ONE minstrel of whom we have a detailed account in his own hand, is Ulrich von Lichtenstein, a wealthy Austrian noble. His autobiography which was completed about the year 1255, and the "Frauenbuch" give us a curious insight into the habits and manners of those days.

While yet a boy, Ulrich was deeply impressed with the necessity of devoting his life to some bright and beauteous dame and when, in his twelfth year, he entered the service of a princess afterwards the wife of Frederick the Warlike, Duke of Austria, as page, he could find nothing better to do than to fall desperately in love with his mistress. He describes, in verses of much grace and naiveté, the delight that thrilled his soul if her white hand but touched the spot whereon he leant, if she deigned to inhale the perfume of the flowers which, night and morning, he laid before her feet. After passing three years in her house-

hold, and learning the knightly exercises of spear-throwing, riding &c. he was promoted to the office of squire and at length knighted, at the marriage of an Austrian prince. From this moment his whole existence was devoted to his lady's service.

The princess accepted complacently enough his offers of devotion, but would hear of nothing more, partly perhaps on account of the difference of rank, and partly because "he was too ugly". The latter accusation was but too true, for Ulrich had the misfortune to have three lips, a deformity it was impossible to overlook.

No sooner had he learnt the pretext for her refusal, than off he galloped to a famous surgeon in Steinmark, and had the offending lip at once cut off, a proof of love sufficient, one would have thought, to have melted the hardest heart, and the merit of which, in these days of chloroform and skilful surgery, we can hardly adequately appreciate. The surgeon wished to bind him; but the gallant knight would not hear of such an indignity and, after undergoing the operation without a groan, and some weeks' fever and confinement with a patience and fortitude still more exemplary, he ventured to present himself before the castle of his lady who at length admitted him, though only, as she declared, to see whether or not he was endurable.

In one of the many tournaments in which he maintained the supremacy of her charms, a finger was severed from his right hand so that it hung only by a portion of skin, and news was brought to the lady that Ulrich had lost a finger in her service. She

seemed for an instant moved with compassion; but learning the exact state of the case, resumed her usual coldness and accused the unfortunate knight of exaggeration. No sooner did Ulrich hear of this than placing the wounded finger on a block, he commanded one of his squires to sever it at once and for ever. He then had it placed in a splendid casket of green velvet with golden key and lid, upon the latter of which were graven two hands clasping each other in supplication, and comforted himself with the reflection that, now at least, the inexorable fair one would have something belonging to him perpetually before her eyes.

Unluckily we find on close investigation, that at the very moment Ulrich was performing so many gallant feats and enduring so much suffering for the sake of this haughty beauty, he had actually a wife and two or three sweet children, though of the particulars of the marriage, he does not deign to inform us. The bonds of matrimony sat lightly on the gallant knight, as on most of his class in the olden times, and did not interfere in the slightest degree with his passion for the "mistress of his soul", as he calls her. What became of his lawful wife all this time, or how she regarded the devotion of her lord at another shrine, we are not informed; but the contemplation of this singular picture of manners leads us, we must confess, to many serious reflections as to the real happiness of the human race and of the fair sex in particular, despite all the benefits the introduction of chivalry had conferred on them in those far famed days of romance and song. Many circumstances combine to prove that the

noble lady, to whom Ulrich offered his heart and his finger, afforded him but very slight encouragement, though a sense of gratified vanity prevented her from absolutely refusing him admittance to her presence. Meanwhile, not content with all his other absurd manifestations of love, he assumed female attire and, with several of his followers, wandered through the country harp in hand, singing the praises of the high born fair one, and attracting crowds of spectators by the singularity of his costume, the sweetness of his lays and the prowess of his arm. At length, the princess who seems to have remained in single blessedness rather longer than was usual in one of her rank and beauty, married in her turn and, owing either to some jealousy on the part of her husband, or to scruples of conscience rather unusual in that age, resolved on putting an end to the persevering courtship which had hitherto amused if it had not touched her. For this purpose, she permitted an interview; but instead of her remonstrances producing any effect, the sight of her beauty only inflamed Ulrich's susceptible heart, and he began to press his suit in a manner so displeasing to its object, that she ordered him to be summarily ejected by being pushed out of the open casement, and he rolled down the castle wall with so much noise, that the watchmen on the neighbouring towers thought the devil was making an inroad into the fortress, and crossed and blessed themselves accordingly. But far from being corrected by this unceremonious treatment, Ulrich's passion only derived fresh vigour from his fall.

In vain did the lady command him to set out for Palestine with the Emperor Frederick; he still followed her steps and sang her charms. At length, to get rid of him, she played him some trick worse than the last, at least if we may judge by the fact that Ulrich does not think fit to communicate it to the public. The effect, however, was all that could be desired. Ulrich's fatal passion was radically cured and, instead of love ditties, he now poured forth satires full of invectives against the relentless fair one. To exist, however, without some object for his fantastic affections was not possible and, choosing another mistress, he repeated for her all the follies he had committed for her predecessor. But the strangest of all is that he relates this with the utmost naiveté and simplicity, at the ripe age of *fifty five*, without a word that would lead to the inference that he was one whit ashamed of what he had done, or wiser for the experience he had acquired. Whether Ulrich ever came to the right use of his senses, we know not. At all events, his absurdities do not seem to have abridged his existence, for he lived to the age of 75 or 76 years. The ruins of his castle of Frauenburg still exist and attest its ancient magnificence. These extravagancies prove, but too clearly, how easy it is for all that is loftiest and holiest to degenerate into absurdity, when unrestrained by fixed principles of religion and morality. It accounts, likewise, for the rapid decline of chivalry and why, as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the word "Minne", originally employed to express the purest and tenderest sentiments, became, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a byword for profligacy and licentiousness.

But whatever may have been the faults and failings of the writer, the autobiography itself, especially the lays with which it is interspersed, though displaying no great wealth of imagery, are pleasing from their graces and naiveté. But our readers shall judge for themselves: (¹)

## 1.

Ladies bright and ladies fair,  
 Ladies blest and ladies good,  
 For love, I ween, ye little care;  
 Else were ye not so light of mood:  
 If ye loved at all,  
 Your ripe red lips so small  
 Would soon to sighing fall.

## 2.

Say, fair knight, what means the word?  
 Is it woman, is it man?  
 For of this I never heard.  
 Tell me, prithee, if ye can,  
 What the thing may mean;  
 What it is when seen,  
 To guard 'gainst it, I ween.

## 3.

Love is puissant, lady bright,  
 All lands bow before its throne:  
 Strange and varied is its might;  
 More anon will I make known.

. . . . .

---

(¹) Ulrich von Lichtenstein mit Anmerkungen von Theodor von Karajan.  
 Herausgegeben von Lachman. 1841.

## 4.

Tell me can it smoothe the smart  
Of the sad and longing soul?  
Can it elevate the heart?  
Give us virtue, self controul?

. . . . .

## 5.

Lady, countless is its treasure,  
And anon I'll tell you more.  
Love gives honour, bliss and pleasure;  
Love enhances virtue's store.

. . . . .

## 6.

Say, fair knight, how shall I gain  
This reward? I pray thee, speak:  
Must I suffer grief or pain?  
For that my body is too weak.

. . . . .

## 7.

Let thy faith to mine be plighted;  
Love me, fair dame, as I love thee:  
When we too are thus united  
That we make but one, thou'l see  
    If thou art mine  
    I shall be thine.  
No, to that I'll ne'er incline;  
Be your own, and I'll be mine.

*Second lay.*

## 1.

Hail to thee, summer! hail tenfold  
To thy delicious joyous prime!  
Thou makest amends for winter's cold,  
Thy coming gives us dainty time.

Thou art sweet!  
Therefore thee I sweetly greet.

Heath and field and valley fair  
I ne'er beheld more lovely yet;  
With sweet dews of summer air  
All the tiny flowers are wet:

On each spray,  
Birds sing praise to lovely May.

## 2.

And my humble song I raise  
Unto woman fair and kind,  
And seek to banish by her praise  
My strange disquiet mood of mind.

Woman's kindness charms  
And frees my soul from all alarms.

*Third Lay.*

In the woods and in the bowers,  
Little birds pour forth their lay:  
On the heath, bloom beauteous flowers,  
All to greet the approach of May.  
Thus my heart would likewise soar  
To her image dear and pure,  
Which enriches me far more  
Than a dream of wealth the poor.

. . . . .

*Forth Lay.*

## 1.

Know ye the lady whom I seek,  
 Have you seen her in dell or bower?  
 She is daintie, soft and meek;  
 Blue her een, and red her cheek,  
 And in her hand she holds a flower.

## 2.

That flower it is the lily white,  
 The emblem of her soul so pure;  
 Her hair is not with gems bedight,  
 Her girdle is not drawn too tight;  
 She never seeketh to allure.

## 3.

I know her well;  
 As bees draw forth all hidden sweets,  
 E'en so she draws, with marvellous spell,  
 The closest secrets that do dwell  
 Within the hearts of those she meets.

## 4.

She is sole mistress of my heart;  
 She rules it, as the moon the tide,  
 She can bid all my griefs depart;  
 She can soothe my bosoms smart,  
 And much more beside.

After the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the poetry of the minnesingers which had shed so bright a lustre on the middle ages, began gradually to decline. With Walter von der Vogelweide it may be said to have reached its culminating point, albeit its sun did not entirely set. There were some who, though their names have been less bruited by the trumpet of fame, have left lays equal in sweetness, if not in variety.

of subject, to those of the more celebrated minstrels. Heinrich von Morenger is distinguished by warmth and sweetness.

Conrad von Würtzburg, one of the last of German minstrels, was likewise one of the most fruitful. So far as we can learn, he was not of knightly rank; but very little is known of him, save that he resided long at Strasbourg and Basle, and died in 1287 in the latter town.

He has left about sixty thousand verses on the subject of the Trojan war, a legend called Sylvesta, a poem in praise of the holy virgin 2000 verses long, and several didactic poems. These compositions display more harmony and the metre is more correct than in many productions of the same period; but they are so insufferably tedious, that it is scarcely possible to wade through them.

We venture on the translation of a few stanzas of the Trojan war which still enjoys a certain reputation in Germany.

#### ARRIVAL OF PARIS IN GREECE. (Müller's Ausgabe.)

Verse 19 to 28.

There lay an island near the sea,  
It was call'd Cytherea:  
To that, his course he wended,  
And there awhile descended  
With all his weary band  
Upon the beauteous strand,  
They donn'd their best array  
Which shone so bright and gay.

. . . . .  
.

Beside the silvery flood,  
A marble temple stood:  
And there to celebrate,  
It seems, a marriage fête,  
Had press'd a numerous throng,  
With music and with song.  
There sounded harp and lyre,  
Trumpet and tuneful quire.  
The temple was bedight  
With gold and jewels bright,  
And many a fragrant flower,  
Just like a summer bower.  
Sweet voices' mingled sound  
Filled all the air around,  
And tapers brightly shone  
On gem and precious stone.

The very virtuous Paris enters to offer up his homage to the Goddess.

Paris, as all allowed,  
Was 'mid the motley crowd  
By far the noblest seen,  
Alike in dress and mien, &c.

Ne'er had the Greeks before  
Seen silk like that he wore;  
While gems and ruddy gold  
Sparkled in every fold.  
He was fair from head to foot,  
In form and dress to boot.

Helen and her dames hear tell of these wondrous strangers:

She heard there was a knight  
As an angel fair and bright;  
Just like a summer rose  
When its first leaves unclose.

To see him she, too, hastens to the temple to present her offering:

She was sovereign of the land,  
All bowed to her command.  
Of pure and royal birth,  
And ne'er was seen on earth  
A form so wondrous fair,  
Such eyes, such golden hair;  
In person and in mind  
The flower of womankind.

Among the minnesingers are two whose fame, albeit it rests on the testimony of their contemporaries only, was evidently of no mean order, Henry von Ofterdingen and Klingsohr of Hungary. In the anonymous poem "the minstrel war on the Wartburg" written, so far as we can discover, about the year 1207, they are introduced as challenging and defeating all their rivals in poetic skill. A modern critic (<sup>1</sup>) has indeed expressed serious doubts as to whether this combat ever really took place; but contests of this nature were by no means unfrequent especially in Provence. When the high born baron, says Sismondi, "had invited to his plenary court his neighbours, three days were given to joust and tournaments; the young nobles or pages fought the first, secondly the knights newly armed, thirdly the warriors grown old under their weapons. The lady of the castle, surrounded by youthful beauties, distributed the prize to the victors

---

(<sup>1</sup>) Bismarck, Geschichte deutscher Literatur. Vol. 1st p. 289.

chosen by the judges of the lists. She then opened her own court; arms were replaced by verses. The word "Tenson" signified a defiance. One knight, harp in hand, preluded, proposing the object in dispute: another followed replying by a strophe in the same measure, and often in the same rhythm, thus alternating their improvisation, but generally confining it to five lines. Then the court deliberated, discussed the merits of the poet and the poem, and gave in verse a decree which decided the question."

But in the poem before us there is one feature we seek in vain in the annals either of German or Provençal combats of this nature, the apparition of the headsman who stands ready to fulfill his office on the vanquished. We must confess we cannot concur in the warm eulogiums that have been pronounced on a production possessing but little merit in a poetic point of view, commencing by flattery as fulsome as puerile to the sovereigns of the respective minstrels, concluding by disquisitions imitated from those of Alcuin and the schools of Charlemagne in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and, in which, the only original trait is the introduction of the executioner, an idea contrary to history and repugnant to common sense. The court of Hermann von Thüringen, the scene in which the author lays this minstrel warfare, was the most polished in Germany, and there is no possible reason for supposing that a practice so barbarous was adopted there, or that the blood of the unsuccessful poet ever stained the sumptuous castle of the Wartburg, a fitting theatre for these courts of love.

We fear the list of minnesingers already given has almost sufficed to tire the patience of our readers. We will trouble them with two more only, ere turning to the epic poems of Wolfrain and Godfried, Nithard, and Henry von Meissen surnamed Frauenlob, from a poem in which he maintained the superior merit of the word *frau* or *frow*, as it was then written, to *weib* or wife as applied to the fair sex.

Nithard was born in Bavaria and the contemporary of Ulrich von Lichtenstein. His earlier poems, like those of most of his brother minstrels, were devoted to the praise of woman and to descriptions of natural scenery; the song of birds, the melody of running streams are the favorite subjects of his muse, but gradually his lays assume a less romantic character and are full of vivid delineations of village life and rustic sports. It has, indeed, been hinted by some profane writers, that such intimate acquaintance with the habits and manners of the lower classes could have been acquired only by one born among them, and that he was of peasant extraction; but this assertion is indignantly repelled by his biographers<sup>(1)</sup>.

Of Frauenlob little is known, which is much to be regretted in the interest of love and chivalry. He died at Mainz in 1318, and was borne to the grave amid the tears and lamentations of all the female inhabitants of the city, who thus evinced their grateful sense of the devotion of his life and muse to their

---

(1) Leben von Nithard, von Wadernagel herausgegeben.

honor. It is even said they poured wine upon his grave, in such profusion that it flowed in streams through the churchyard, and that young maidens emptied baskets of fresh rose leaves into the purple river with which they mingled their tears (<sup>1</sup>).

---

(<sup>1</sup>) Heinrich von Meissen's des Frauenlobes Leiche, Sprüche und Lieder. Erläutert von Ludwig Eitmüller.

---

## CHAPTER XI.

WOLFRAM VON ESCHENBACH. — GODFREY VON STRASBURG. — HARTMANN VON DER AUE. — THE TITUREL. — THE PARCIVAL. — THE LOHENGRÜN. — WILLIAM OF ORANGE. — TRISTAN AND YSOLDE. — THE WIGALOIS. — IRIC AND IWEIN.

LET us now turn to Wolfram von Eschenbach and Gottfried von Strasburg who would have good reason to be offended, were they omitted from the list of minstrels among whom they played so distinguished a part. Indeed, the lyric warblings of the Minnesingers may be regarded as a kind of prelude to those vast productions, at once grotesque and grandiose, to which we are about to introduce our readers, where we find the real and the imaginary, the wildest dreams of fancy and the positive incidents of life mingled in strange but picturesque confusion.

The Parcival of Wolfram von Eschenbach, the most celebrated of these poems, though founded on the British legend of King Arthur and his knights of the round table, is in fact an imitation of the Romans of the trouvères and troubadours, who, attracted to the court of Henry the 2<sup>nd</sup> when, by his marriage

with Eleonore of Poitiers, he became Lord of Aquitaine and Gascony, eagerly seized on a theme so replete with the elements of romance and song. In their hands, it speedily assumed a character very different from its pristine simplicity. The romantic and spirit-stirring adventures of the crusaders, the mighty deeds of Charlemagne and his Paladins, embellished by the magic power of time and distance, were rapidly blended with the original tradition. The simple king, the petty chief of an insignificant tribe who, after long defending his land against the invading Saxons, fell in 542 in the unequal struggle, was transformed into the brilliant representative of the chivalry of the middle ages, and his very patriarchal court into the model of all knightly magnificence.

We need only compare the *Parcival* of Chrétien de Troyes, with its undoubted source the *Piradwr ab Efrawe*, to perceive how completely the homely spirit of the legend, in its primitive state, is changed by the French minstrels. (1)

Never has novel or romance spread with such rapidity, or enjoyed such popularity, as the *Tristan*, the *Parcival* and the *Lancelot of the Lake*, though their enormous proportions would make us tremble at the mere idea of attempting their perusal. The readers, indeed, were principally confined to the fair sex who, in the solitude of their feudal castles while their lords were engaged in war or the chase, had time enough to master alphabetic

(1) The *Piradwr ab Efrawe*, in the *Mabinogion*, translated by Lady C. Guest.

lore and many of whom were themselves poets of no mean order.

That these works were meant to be read, not like the lyric verses of the minstrels or the earlier lays of the Franks and Germans to be sung, is self evident; for, supposing it were possible for any human memory to retain and recite twenty or thirty thousand verses at a time, who could ever have had either leisure or patience to listen to them? Mr. Fauriel, a high authority on such matters, suggests that the most striking portions were probably selected by the troubadours as theme of song, (1) but the poems themselves, bound in rich velvet, and often adorned with gold or gems, might be seen in every ladies' bower, more particularly in France, where they enjoyed a favour still more universal than on our side of the channel.

Nor was this astonishing. France was the cradle of chivalry and, in these wondrous beings of fancy, she beheld only the idealization of real and living heroes. In the great movement of the crusades it was France which had taken the lead and, though none among the warriors who followed that brilliant chimera of the middle ages exceeded our own in martial prowess or heroic daring, it was from France that came the first impetus, and it was there that the enthusiasm for the rescue of the holy sepulchre lingered, when it was extinguished elsewhere.

The trouvères or troubadours, indeed, needed not any very great range of imagination to invest a

(1) Poésie Provençale. Vol. 2d. p. 209.

Godfrey, a Tancred and a Baudouin, whose exploits already exceeded belief, with the attributes of the marvellous and supernatural.

But in Germany, whither these poems found their way towards the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (the knights and nobles of the two countries having been brought into momentary contact by the crusades), they would probably have met with but slight favour, had there not been, grafted on the original material, a legend whose deep and mystic import was more in accordance with the vague and dreamy spirit which, even then, characterized the German race, that of the St. Graal which, whatever its origin, whether it spring from the East or was the invention of the trouvères or troubadours, passed rapidly into the cycle of Britannic fable, and was arranged and localized by the Anglo-Norman poets.

Our limits will not permit us to investigate, as thoroughly as we could desire, the source of this most singular legend, or all the theories to which it has given rise; so deep is the obscurity in which it is invested that all the light which has hitherto been thrown upon it, has served only to render the darkness more visible.

In the prose romance of Robert Boron, the exact date of which is uncertain, but which probably was written about the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, we find the following version of this singular story. After the death of Christ, Joseph of Arimathea repaired to the house where the Saviour had supped for the last time, found the vase, whence he had poured the wine, still on the table and carefully car-

ried it away. Thrown into prison by the Jews, he lay captive for many long years, was delivered by Titus whom he secretly baptized and, leaving Jerusalem, after traversing the East and going through all sorts of adventures, reached Britain, became king and built a splendid castle for the sacred vase or Graal.

But there is yet another account at once more detailed and moré poetical which, while adhering to the main features of the legend, invests them with a brighter hue; this is reproduced by Wolfram von Eschenbach who found it, not in the poem of Chrétien de Troyes, but in one which he declares of greater antiquity, by Kiot or Guiot, a Provençal, and he severely reprimands Chrétien for his unauthorized and, as he considers, ill advised divergence from the original.<sup>(1)</sup> According to this, the Graal was formed of a precious stone of glorious beauty; he who gazed on it, though sick to death, could not expire till it was removed from his sight, and he who was permitted to look on it continually, enjoyed the boon of unfading youth and health.

Every Friday, a white dove brought down the Host from heaven and placed it in the holy vessel. To be its guardian was the highest honour to which mankind could aspire and could be obtained only by the pure in heart and hand. These guardians formed an order of knighthood, the noblest and loftiest that existed on earth, wise and brave, sober and temperate, chaste and gentle, devoted to the service of God and the protection of the helpless and oppressed.

---

(1) See the Parcival, verse 4941.

They were called Templars, and there can be little doubt that they were intended to personify the order of knight templars, ere corrupted by vice and luxury. The earliest mention of the legend, either in the Provençal or Northern French literature, is between A. D. 1130 and A. D. 1190, whereas the order of Templars was founded in 1118, by a few French knights, companions to Godfrey de Bouillon (<sup>1</sup>). The immense influence and important results of this institution, the members of which united at once the holiness of the monk and the daring valour of the warrior, sufficiently account for the high attributes with which they are invested in the legend. Kiot who gives as his source, a heathen of the name of Flegatanus, tells us that the Graal was conveyed not to Brittany but to Biscay, where no mortal having yet been discovered worthy to become its guardian, it was held suspended in the air by angels, till Titurel, the fabulous son of a fabulous King of Anjou, was led thither by the express finger of Providence, and there upon a rock inaccessible to ordinary mortals, built a temple for the Graal and a castle for its defenders, and founded the holy order we have already mentioned. The temple was of circular form and, around it, stood seventy two chapels, each surmounted by a tower, six stories high, while in the midst, arose another tower of double that height. The vaulted roofs of the chapels were of blue sapphire and, in the centre, was a sheet of costly emeralds, with the lamb and the cross em-

---

(<sup>1</sup>) *Einführung zum Lehngrün von Joseph Görres.*

blazoned in gold. All the altar-pieces were likewise of sapphires, as emblematic of the Atonement of sin, while rare and costly gems were every where scattered profusely around. In the centre of the principal dome of this superb temple, were the sun and moon, the one in sparkling diamonds, the other in topazes. The windows were not of glass but of crystal, beryls and other precious stones on which were painted, in the most exquisite colours, designs of the rarest beauty. The turrets were of gold, the summit of the centre dome was formed by a single carbuncle which shone amid the darkness of the night, to light the weary pilgrim. In the centre of the principal dome stood another temple in miniature still more brilliant and beautiful, and, in this, the holy Graal itself<sup>(1)</sup> was deposited. Around this magic temple lay a wood where none could penetrate save the pure in heart and deed. Centuries passed on and still the temple stood in its pristine splendour, watched and defended by its faithful guardians till, at length, the increasing wickedness of the western world rendering it unworthy of so sacred a deposit, it was borne back by angels to some unknown region in the east. In the Parcival by Wolfram von Eschenbach, this legend holds the most important place, and how fully it was credited then and long afterwards, is evident from the fact that various countries disputed the honour of possessing the holy vessel. Among these no pretensions seem so valid as those of the Genoese. In the cathedral of St. Lo-

---

(1) Sulpice Boisserée, über den Tempel des heiligen Grals.

renzo is still preserved a cup or vase, long supposed to be formed of a single emerald, to which was attached the same tradition as that of the holy Graal; it was assigned to the Genoese at the conquest of Cesarea in 1100, and long regarded with the deepest veneration.

But the discovery made when, in 1798, it was carried with so many other treasures to Paris, that it was composed merely of oriental glass instead of a single emerald as had hitherto been believed, somewhat shook the faith in its holy origin, although glass having been invented long before the coming of Christ, this circumstance alone would not invalidate the authenticity of the tale. After all, when we see how many relics of antiquity have been saved from destruction under circumstances which rendered their preservation still more unlikely, it is not quite impossible that the vase of St. Lorenzo may be that which was consecrated by the touch of divine lips.

Wolfram von Eschenbach, who first introduced this singular legend into German literature, was of noble birth, though not very richly endowed by fortune, if we are to judge by his perpetual complaints of poverty. From the invectives against the laws of primogeniture, with which he commences the history of Gamuret, his biographer San Maite conclude that he was not the first born of his house.<sup>(1)</sup> His frequent mention of, and evident close acquaintance with, the most interesting localities of his native land, the Schwarzwald, the Odenwald &c. lead to the inference

---

(1) Vorrede zum Percival von H. Mart. Magdeburg 1856.

that, at one time or other, he had visited most of them, probably harp in hand. In 1204, he repaired to the court of the Landgrave Hermann of Thüringen, a prince equally celebrated for his personal and mental qualities. At the university of Paris, where in his youth he had pursued his studies, the Landgrave had imbibed a taste for literature, not a little rare in German princes of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. He assembled around him the most celebrated minstrels of the period, loading them with largesse and favours. At the brilliant fêtes and tournays, for which this court was distinguished, Wolfram doubtless played a conspicuous part, but, unfortunately, very little can be gathered of his adventures. We do not even know whether he was married or single, though, from certain passages in his poems, we are led rather to suppose the latter. Even the exact date of his death is not ascertained, but it is generally believed to have taken place about 1220 to 1225. He was buried, it is said, in the church of Lieb Frauen, at Eschenbach, but of his grave no traces now remain.

The Titurel, the first of Wolfram's epic poems, would alone by no means justify the reputation he enjoys. The plan is so confused, the *dramatis personae* so numerous, as to puzzle the most attentive reader.

Many of the events seem utterly without aim, end or connection with each other; the personages appear and disappear as in a magic lantern, without any sufficient reason or motive and are, generally speaking, so utterly devoid of individuality, that, at best, they could only be distinguished by their names, if indeed it were possible to remember them, a task that

might defy the best of memories. But we must recollect that the Titurel was left in an unfinished state, and was completed by another hand, that of Alfred von Scharfenberg; therefore but a very small portion can really be traced to that of Wolfram.

The following is a brief summary of the first poem of this curious Trilogy.

Titurel, the founder of the temple of the holy Graal, dying when he has accomplished his pious work, is succeeded by his son Tinmontel who, however, disdaining his Sire's example, listens to the suggestions of sensual passions. Though a father and a husband, for marriage is permitted by the rules of the St. Graal, in that respect differing from the real religious orders, he becomes enamoured of a fair and frail damsel and is killed at a tournament he gives in her honour. His son, Anfortas, who succeeds to the same high dignity, having been severely wounded in battle, is conveyed to the castle appropriated to the knights of the St. Graal where he is destined to remain in this sad condition, till Parcival, the hero of the next tale, shall deliver him from his sufferings and restore him to health; meanwhile Anfortas' niece, the young and fair Sigune, has bestowed her heart and hand on a gallant knight with a most unpronounceable name, who, after a brief period of wedded happiness, leaves her awhile to follow his relation, the valiant Gamuret to the Holy Land.

Here Gamuret is killed, but Tcsionatulander is more fortunate and returns to his fair and fond Sigune, crowned with victory; the bliss of the young pair, however, is not destined to be of long duration.

One day Sigune, while wandering in the forest with her lord, perceives a greyhound of great beauty, around whose neck is a collar with a device which attracts her curiosity. In a fatal moment she entreats her husband to catch the animal, which flies from her with the rapidity of lightning.

Tcsionatulander reaches the prize, but it belongs to a master, to tear it from whom costs the young hero his life. The anguish of Sigune may be conceived. Accusing herself as authoress of her husband's destruction, she abandons herself to despair and falls at length a victim to her sorrow. (1)

The second poem of the trilogy, of an order far superior, celebrates the adventures of Parcival, great grand-son to Titurel, who has been educated by his sad and widowed mother in profound retirement. Thus he grows to manhood, grave, thoughtful and highminded, full of vague though heroic hopes and aspirations. One day, when roving alone and pensive in the depths of the woods, he beholds three knights in splendid armour, mounted on prancing steeds. At the sight, the longing for busier scenes wakes in his young soul; he flies to his mother and implores her permission to enter that world where his father had won so glorious a renown.

She consents with many tears and he hastens to the court of King Arthur, where his youthful beauty, his courage, the skill which, by intuition we suppose, he exhibits in all manly exercises and feats of arms,

---

(1) The Titurel was first published by Docen, 1810.

excite general admiration. Hearing that a certain fair princess is besieged in her palace by her rebellious subjects, he flies to her rescue, saves her, and receives her hand as his reward; then, overcome by the desire of again beholding his mother, he bids his bride farewell and hastens to his native glens. The first evening of his journey, some fishermen of whom he enquires his way, lead him to a lofty castle; he is introduced into a spacious and splendid hall, where four hundred knights are seated on superb couches. On the most costly, reclines a stately form wrapped in furs, and bearing on his noble countenance an expression of deep suffering. This is the King Anfortas, and the castle is no other than the fortress of the Holy Graal, a fact, however, of which Parcival remains in profound ignorance. He is mute with surprise and admiration:

He gazed awhile; the changes rung!  
The gates of steel have open flung  
Their portals; two sweet maidens there  
Appear; with veil and flowery wreath,  
Binding the tresses long and fair  
Which fall in waving locks beneath.

Two candlesticks of beaten gold  
This lovely pair, all graceful, bear:  
If aught could move the king to love,  
Sick as he is, he'd find it there.  
It was the Countess of Terriprobe,  
And her sweet friend; a girdle bright  
Confined the rich and scarlet robe,  
Which floated o'er her form of light!

A second pair then nearer drew;  
 Of these one was a duchess too.  
 A tray of ivory pure she bore;  
 Her lips were red as summer roses,  
 Her robe with gems all studded o'er  
 A hue deep as her lips discloses:  
 The virgins bow'd and placed the tray  
 Before the monarch where he lay.

Four more, with torches, then appear,  
 And then four more who bear a stone  
 Shining with radiance, bright and clear,  
 That eye can scarcely gaze upon!

These lovely maids, so young and fair,  
 Had wreaths of flowers amid their hair  
 Their robes, tight bound with jewell'd zone  
 Were green as grass, when freshly grown!

. . . . .  
 A length, appeared the queen alone,  
 A light from her sweet features shone,  
 As when, at the approach of day,  
 Shines, through the clouds, the sun's bright ray!  
 Upon a cushion soft and fair  
 Of finest silk that Persia wove,  
 She bore that treasure, rich and rare,  
 All earthly joy, or bliss above!  
 To which no mortal dare aspire!  
 Above the reach of all desire,  
 The Holy Graal!

In itself this picture is graceful enough, and if we regard the poem, more particularly those portions which relate to the St. Graal, in a symbolic sense "as a picture of the secret struggles of the soul (1), the com-

---

(1) Billmar's Geschichte der deutschen Literatur.

bat between matter and spirit", we may easily believe that these fair damsels were intended to represent the virtues, cardinal, theological, etc. Dante, who probably had some acquaintance with the language of that emperor whom he regarded as the last hope of Italy, may perhaps have perused this singular production and had it in his recollection when delineating those lovely female forms in robes of varied hue, whom he frequently introduces in his "Divina Comedia."<sup>(1)</sup>

Parcival retires to rest. He finds next morning, on awaking, his vestments and a rich scimitar the king had presented him beside him, and a horse, ready saddled and bridled, stands at the castle gate, but no human form is to be seen. Parcival mounts his steed and is riding slowly away, when he hears a mocking voice and beholds a dwarf upon the castle walls, who tauntingly reproaches him for not having "*enquired*"; and then, with a wild unearthly laugh, disappears. Soon after he meets a lovely maiden, overwhelmed with grief and holding in her arms a bleeding corpse. It is his cousin Sigune, bearing the body of her beloved husband and, though it is the first time they have ever met, they recognise each other as relatives. From her, Parcival learns his fatal omission in not enquiring the name of the spot where he had been welcomed; for by him and him alone, could Anfortas be restored to health.

While musing on all these extraordinary proceedings, Parcival perceives three drops of blood in the snow, for it is winter, and somehow or other, these drops

---

(1) The Parcival was written according to Lachman in 1242. Above a century before the Divina Comedia.

recall the recollection of his wife who, it must be confessed, does not seem hitherto to have occupied any prominent place in his memory. Years, however, are to pass e'er he again beholds her or his twin boys to whom, since his departure, she has given birth, and, on this very spot, they are to meet again.

Parcival's journey is a useless one. He is never more to behold the author of his being. Soon after his departure, his sad and broken-hearted mother all whose affections had been bound up in her son, had closed her eyes for ever on this world of woe.

After many more adventures, of which our limits will not permit the details, Parcival returns to King Arthur's court, where he is about to be received as knight of the round table when a foul enchantress suddenly makes her appearance and pronounces a curse on him for that omission which, though apparently so venial, had led to such calamitous results; for Anfortas is still a victim to his wound. Sad, yet resigned, the young hero renounces his fond hopes of distinction and resolves, as an expiation of his unconscious sin, to devote himself henceforward to the defence of the holy Graal, if permitted this high honour. Then, mounting his steed, he rides sorrowfully away.

For four long and weary years does Parcival wander through the world, during which the poem loses sight of him entirely and gives us a spirited account of the earthly order of knighthood of which however the hero is Gawain. During this period, the youth has, it appears, lost his trust in man and God. At length, he comes again upon the scene and now he

meets, by happy chance, a knight who by his wise and holy council, gradually leads back his erring spirit to faith, trust and hope. By him he is conducted to an aged hermit who, he learns, is his uncle (he is fortunate enough to find relations every where) who has long devoted himself of the service of God and who teaches him that pride and self-esteem are insuperable obstacles to that high and holy office, which is now the aim of all his desires. It was these passions which had subjected Anfortas to the power of the demon and exposed him to that terrible wound from which he was to recover only when Parcival, to whom he was to deliver up the sovereignty, should enter the fortress and ask those simple yet mysterious questions already indicated.

We cannot follow Parcival through all his adventures. Suffice it to say that, disdaining worldly fame or honour, he henceforth devotes the whole energies of his noble nature to those duties and sacrifices which alone can make him worthy of becoming the guardian of the holy Graal. After encountering many dangers, vanquishing many foes, he at length once more obtains admittance into the mysterious castle, and this time, as may be imagined, does not forget his question. He has the satisfaction of restoring the king to health and of once more beholding his long lost wife and embracing the children he has never yet beheld. To the youngest of these sons he gives over his temporal kingdom; the elder, Lohengrin, is to succeed him in the more precious sovereignty which he himself assumes. But, from this moment, a law is promulgated by which all knights of the holy

Graal are forbidden, when they have once left the precincts of the fortress, to disclose to any earthly ear from what origin they are sprung. This prohibition is the ground-work of the Lohengrün, the last poem of the trilogy.

In Brabant reigned a certain duke who, at his death, recommended his only daughter Elvara to the care and protection of his friend and vassal, Frederick von Tebramand. Taking advantage of his position, the traitor seeks to force the princess to become his bride; she rejects his suit, and applies for aid to the Emperor Charlemagne who refers the affair to the judgment of God, or in other words, a duel. But so much is the knight dreaded that none venture to step forward in behalf of the oppressed and defenceless princess.

In her anguish, she bethinks her of the renowned King Arthur and his paladins and, seizing a golden bell which has the magic property of being heard at the distance of thousands of miles, she rings it with such force that the sound reaches the court of the sovereign, while, at the same moment, an inscription suddenly starts up on the table at which he is seated, informing him of the lady's distress. Instantly all the knights present offer themselves to defend the honour of the beautiful Elvara, but Lohengrün obtaining the preference, a silver car drawn by four snowy swans appears, and bears him safely to the appointed spot. The duel ensues. Lohengrün is victor and, according to the custom of those days, his enemy pays the penalty of his guilt with his life. Lohengrün weds the princess, on condition of her

swearing never to enquire his race or name. They live together in happiness for many years till, in an evil hour, she presses him to disclose the fatal secret. Long does Lohengrin resist her entreaties. At length he yields, though with an aching heart, and promises to fulfill her wish. He invites the Emperor and Empress to Brabant, relates his whole story together with the fatal vow which compels him to depart the moment it is revealed, bids his weeping wife a fond farewell and, springing into the magic car which at that moment appears, vanishes for ever from her view.

This poem contains about seventy thousand and seventy verses. The only complete edition we know of, is that of Görres, published at Heidelberg, 1813. We append a translation of one or two passages.

#### HOW LOHENGRÜN WAS RECEIVED BY THE QUEEN.

Now, when the hour of the repast had sounded,  
 The table with most sumptuous fare abounded,  
 The king was placed beside the lovely queen,  
 She tender'd him her hand so soft and white,  
 Her long and taper fingers; ne'er, I ween,  
 Was throat so fair, or eyes so wondrous bright.

Much was there now of courtesy blithe and gay;  
 Singing and harping, song and roundelay,  
 As is the wont in courts; each noble dame  
 Array'd herself in strange and motley guise:  
 Then to the dance both knights and ladies came  
 And led the dizzy maze in merry wise.

Despite the immense reputation enjoyed by these poems, their inferiority in many respects to those of

pure German origin, must strike, we think, every impartial reader. There is none of that naive simplicity which throws such a charm over the Nibelungen and the Gudrune. Here, incident is heaped upon incident, personage upon personage with such rapidity, such profusion and at the same time such utter want of skill and arrangement, as frequently to destroy the interest their marvellous adventures would otherwise excite. We cannot picture them to ourselves as actual living beings. There is scarcely one, except Sigune, with whom we can sympathise. Their griefs do not touch, their joys do not affect us, their wondrous deeds fail to excite our admiration, or their sufferings to move our pity.

William of Orange, which is likewise attributed to Wolfram, is founded on the fate and fortunes of an historical personage, St. Wilhelm de Narbonne, the theme of more than one French legend. Distinguished alike by his martial prowess and statesmanlike ability, he was the favourite of Charlemagne who, according to tradition, invested him with the dukedom of Aquitaine.<sup>(1)</sup> But he soon renounced all worldly pomp and splendour and finished his days in a monastery he himself founded in a sequestered valley, hallowed by the memory of a pious hermit who had once dwelt on that lonely, but romantic spot. Wolfram's poem is a mere collection of fragments, some of them indeed of considerable beauty. It was continued and

---

(1) *Vita Sancti Guillielmi; Acta Sanctorum, Antwerpiae, Vol. VI. p. 870.*

enlarged by Ulrich von Turlheim, but this continuation is decidedly inferior to the original.

In the poem, William, who completely loses all historical identity, is taken prisoner by the Saracens, wins the heart of the pagan queen who releases him and flies with him, escapes the pursuit of the enraged king and arrives in safety on the coast of France, where his fair companion is baptized and becomes his wife; her previous marriage with a pagan being regarded as null and void, a singular trait of the manners of the age.

The Tristan and Ysolde of Godfried von Strasburg is, in point of style and execution, far superior to any of the poems hitherto mentioned. It attracts the reader by the charm of its images, and the interest attached to the actors, despite its enormous length and its very questionable morality. Godfried left it incomplete; but it was terminated by an unknown writer. In fact, these old romances were seldom or never suffered to remain unfinished. Like the great monuments of the middle ages which were continued by successive generations, they descended from hand to hand, each new author commencing where his predecessor had left off, and conceiving himself sufficiently rewarded for all his pains and trouble, if he lived long enough to bring the work to a satisfactory conclusion.

Of the Tristan and Ysolde we may venture to give rather a more detailed account than of its predecessors. It commences thus:

At Tintayol, in Cornwall, reigns a king of the name of Mark, who has one lovely sister, Blanchefleur.

Touched by the sufferings and manly grace of the gallant knight Privalein of Parmenia whom she has nursed when severely wounded, she yields up to him, in fatal hour, her maiden honour with her heart. The description of the fête where they first meet, is full of those charming pictures of summer bloom and beauty in which the old German poets delight and which redeem, in some degree at least, so many faults of tediousness and want of artistic skill.

#### THE FEAST OF KING MARK AT TINTAYOL.

Then to the feast there came  
Noble knight and lovely dame,  
And many a maiden fair  
In her young bloom was there;

There on a meadow green  
Pleasant as ere was seen,  
The knights and ladies lay,  
Upon that gladsome day.

The fair and daintie summer time  
Was now in all its golden prime;  
The woods were full of tuneful notes  
From feather'd warblers' little throats.

The verdant glen, the fragrant bowers  
Were all bedight with loveliest flowers,  
And flowing waters, pure and clear,  
And all that heart could wish was here.

There were both light and shade;  
The winds sweet music made,  
Blossoms of varied hue  
Laughed 'mid the morning dew.

And every heart was thrilled,  
 And many an eye was filled  
 With tears of pure delight  
 At scenes so fair and bright.

Thus 'mid the rosy bowers,  
 They wiled away the hours;  
 Some sought the balmy breeze  
 Amid the waving trees;

Laughing, singing, sighing,  
 On the cool grass lying,  
 Or whispering in the ear  
 Of lovely lady near;

But not a beauteous maiden there  
 With the king's sister could compare:  
 She shone a morning star of light,  
 So good, so beautiful and bright, &c.

If Boccaccio had been acquainted with the German language, we might be inclined to fancy this glowing picture had suggested the idea of the scene of the Decameron. The princess's brother discovering her fault, banishes her from his court and kingdom and she dies in giving birth to a son, the hero of the poem. The Maréchal who has loved poor Blanchefleur from her childhood, seeks and takes charge of the boy, doubly orphaned, his father having been slain in combat with Morgan, a neighbouring king, and rears him as beseems his birth, exiling himself for his sake from his native land.

Gifted alike in mind and person, the gentle youth is all his adopted father could desire, when he is

carried off by some Norwegian pirates to be sold as a slave.

Overtaken by a tempest however, their vessel is thrown upon a rock and the youth finds himself once more at liberty on an unknown coast, which is no other than that of Cornwall. He resolves to present himself to the king, as the son of a merchant of Parmenia; and so wins his favour by his minstrel; skill and gallant bearing, that the monarch permits him to remain at court where he becomes a universal favourite. Ere long, his foster father who has every where sought his darling, arrives at Tintayol and, in his joy at again beholding him, does not hesitate to disclose his birth and name. The king, touched by the sad fate of his sister, and perhaps repenting his inexorable severity, at once acknowledges her son as his nephew, and bestows upon him the honour of knighthood. His first deed is to revenge the death of his father, by challenging Morgan to single combat and slaying him, and his next, to deliver Cornwall from a tribute it had long paid to Morold, King of Ireland, who also falls beneath his arm.

But Tristan pays dearly for this fatal victory. Wounded by a poisoned shaft from the dying hand of his vanquished foe, he falls into a state of fearful suffering which threatens to bring him to an early grave.

At length he hears that Morold's sister is skilled in all magic and healing arts, which at that time were regarded pretty much as identical, and that it is from her alone he can hope a cure. Disguised as a wandering minstrel, under the name of Jautris,

the young warrior seeks the court of the enchantress, is cured by her wonder working spells and, as a token of gratitude, instructs her daughter, the fair-haired Ysolde, in the art of music in which, it seems, he is a proficient, as well as in the French and Latin languages. But young and lovely as is his pupil, his heart remains so completely untouched by her charms that, on his return to Cornwall, he actually advises his uncle to demand her as his bride. Mark willingly agrees to the proposal and sends his nephew as his ambassador. Tristan is no less successful as a diplomatist than as a warrior and an instructor. He obtains the consent both of mother and daughter and Ysolde embarks with him for Cornwall.

Till now, all has been as grave and proper as the most rigid moralist could desire. But matters are about to undergo a fearful change: Ysolde's mother, dreading lest the difference of years between her blooming daughter and the king of Cornwall may render her unwilling to submit to her destiny when the moment really arrives, has prepared a love potion to be mingled secretly with her beverage on the bridal night. Somehow or other, however, Brangane, Ysolde's faithful companion to whom this magic draught has been confided, allows it to fall into the hands of Tristan and Ysolde who, tempted by its bright hue and delicious odour, are induced to taste it. The passion which, even without the aid of a love potion, might be supposed to have long smouldered in the hearts of two beings so fitted to love and to be loved, bursts forth with fearful intensity, triumphing alike over virgin purity and knightly honour and,

from this moment, the story of the lovers becomes a tissue of deceit and falsehood described, unfortunately, with a gusto which proves that the author rather relished it than otherwise. The complaisant Brangane consents to take the place of Ysolde on the bridal night and the intrigue is carried on with perfect success, until some of the more clear-sighted courtiers, having roused the old king's suspicions, he forbids Tristan his palace and compels Ysolde to submit to the ordeal of boiling water to prove her innocence. She comes forth triumphant, by means of a very simple stratagem, that of previously bathing her hand in a chemical preparation which rendered it insensible to the action of the seething fluid.

For awhile all goes on well. But emboldened by impunity, the lovers venture upon new intrigues which at length excite the jealousy of Mark to such a degree, that he banishes both wife and nephew. But as he is simple enough to exile them together their punishment does not much afflict them. In the enjoyment of their mutual love, they long find more than compensation for the loss of worldly wealth and splendour. Weary at length of exile, they contrive to lull the king's suspicions and obtain permission to return to court. But exposure and disgrace have wrought neither repentance nor amendment and, after a while, the old monarch awaking to the full sense of his dishonour, commands Tristan to leave his realm for ever and places Ysolde under surveillance, though apparently not of a very severe description. Tristan with aching heart (for his love, though guilty, is deep and fervent) departs and, after long

wanderings, reaches the dominions of the Duke of Arundel where he is courteously received and introduced to the duke's daughter who is also called Ysolde!

The identity of name, and some real or imaginary personal resemblance, draw Tristan, who like the rest of his sex is easily moved to forgetfulness, towards the youthful virgin. In gazing at her, he imagines that he once more beholds his beloved one; thus, insensibly, his remembrance of the absent blends itself with the growing passion for the fair young being perpetually before him, till he can no longer separate them and falls into a state inexpressibly painful, where the poem leaves him, as it suddenly *breaks off*, but the results of which are not very doubtful.

In 1250, Ulrich von Turkheim and Henry von Freiburg attempted a continuation, but inferior in every way to the original. This, however, concludes the story. Tristan, unable to resist his growing passion and the evident affection with which he has inspired the young Ysolde, woos and wins her as his own. But even in the bridal night, in the very arms of his bride, the recollection of her to whom he had sworn eternal truth and who doubtless is now mourning his absence, rushes upon his mind with irresistible force and, from that instant, stands like a gloomy spectre between him and his wife. At length, while aiding his brother-in-law in a love adventure, he receives a mortal wound; feeling himself near his end, the longing to behold once more the beloved of his youth overcomes every other consideration and he sends a faithful messenger to the court of Cornwall,

imploring Ysolde to come to him once more before he dies, if it be in her power. If she consent, the messenger is to hoist a white flag on his vessel on his return; if she refuse, a black one. What the feelings of Tristan's wife must have been on the occasion may easily be conceived. At length, the long expected vessel nears the harbour. The dying man enquires what flag it bears, "A black flag", replies Ysolde who sits beside him. The unfortunate Tristan falls back and expires. At the same moment enters she whom he had so anxiously awaited, throws herself upon his corpse, covers it with tears and kisses, and breathes her last sigh upon that lifeless breast.

The flag was white; but the not very unnatural jealousy of Tristan's wife had led her to pronounce the falsehood which has produced so tragic a result. Mark learns, too late, the magic cause of his bride's infidelity and his nephew's treason. Indignation yields to pity. He orders the corpses of the lovers to be laid in one grave, and plants upon their tomb a rose-tree and a vine which mingle their branches and their leaves.

The poetical merits of this work are of no common order. The versification is infinitely superior to that of the Parcival. "Here, observes Villmar, we find nothing of the earnest and often mysterious course of thought of the Parcival. Here the lines, the words, the periods are clear and brilliant as liquid gold. Here we escape those wearisome masses of knights and knightly games, out of the way of which we never can get with Wolfram. Here it is the lovers alone who fetter and attract us."

"Gladsome images accompany us, like a bright and verdant May, at every step".<sup>(1)</sup>

But whatever its poetical merits, in a moral light the *Tristan* and *Ysolde* must ever rank far below the *Parcival*. It may be said, indeed, that if Wolfram leads us into the ideal life of chivalry, Godfried initiates us into its sadder and darker realities and that, as such, the pictures of license with which he presents us, have the merit of faithful transcripts of the manners of the age; but the tone of mockery with which he too often treats all that is pure and holy in our natures, cannot admit of the same apology and tends to level the barriers between vice and virtue.

Of Godfried's life nothing is known though it is believed he was of the Bürger class. In addition to the poem above mentioned, he has left one little lay and a hymn to the Virgin.

We must not pass over without a brief notice, two other minstrels somewhat anterior to Wolfram; Hartmann von der Aue and Wirnt von Gravenberg, and their two most remarkable productions, the *Iric* and *Iwein* and the *Wigalois*, though neither present sufficient interest to claim a long notice. *Iric* and *Iwein* is founded on a subject already treated by Chrétien de Troyes. *Iwein*, the companion in arms of King Arthur, meets with and kills a giant whose widow, to whom he owes his escape from many a peril, he makes his wife. But soon wearying of her charms, he forsakes her to resume his adventurous

---

(1) *Vidmar, Geschichte der deutschen Literatur.*

course of existence. Happening to rescue a lion, the generous brute, more grateful than its master, attaches itself to his footsteps. At length, touched with remorse, Iwein returns to his forsaken bride who, with the usual fond indulgence of a loving woman, pardons and receives him.

In the Wigalois, the hero passes through the usual round of knightly adventures and the work is deserving of attention only as introducing Queen Genvra on the scene, the first and only time she appears in any of the German lays founded on the legend of Arthur and his knights of the Round Table. The absence of this fair though haughty beauty deprives these old Teutonic poems of much of the charm we find in the French romans, despite their enormous length and fantastic recitals.

The description of the palace of the sovereign is graceful and pleasing.

There was, I've heard, of old  
A monarch good and bold ;  
His land was Briton call'd, and he  
King Arthur. At Corandoli  
He dwelt, surrounded with delights,  
With lovely dames and gallant knights.

So far as I could tidings gain,  
This castle stood upon a plain ;  
Around, a mighty forest lay ;  
Full seldom did the monarch stray  
Far from the spot; with horse and hounds  
He loved to hunt within its bounds.

A silver stream flow'd through the wood,  
Close where that royal castle stood,  
And many a wealthy prince and peer  
Had raised his splendid dwelling near,  
Upon the borders of the wood.  
The palace in the centre stood.  
As was the mode in ancient time  
All knights from every land and clime  
Met, if but virtuous and true,  
The gracious welcome, held their due.

The palace of the queen alone  
In rich and varied marble shone.  
Then it had all the eye could please;  
Embower'd in green and lofty trees,  
Whose snowy blossoms rich and fair,  
Embalmed with sweet perfume the air;  
'Twas full of ladies in their state,

. . . . .

---

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE ALEXANDER LIED.

The songs of the round table, the exploits of Parcival or Tristan, were not the only themes of German minstrels. Following their French models, they celebrated the mighty deeds of Alexander and of Charlemagne.

The Alexander Lied of Friar Lamprecht was written about the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The history of Alexander, real and fabulous, had been popular in Germany as far back as the reign of Henry the 4<sup>th</sup>, as we have seen in the "Lied des heiligen Anno." The fame of the Macedonian hero had indeed taken so firm a hold on the imagination, both of his contemporaries and of posterity, that it had not only bidden defiance to the hand of time, but had gathered more transcendent glories with each succeeding age. To his real greatness and triumphs, were added imaginary and superhuman exploits. It was not enough that he should have subjugated the Earth. The feathered tribes must likewise bow be-

neath his sway, and the fish of the ocean pay him homage.

The history, commenced in Alexander's life-time by Callisthenes, the relative and pupil of Aristotle, and long the favourite of the monarch, though eventually he fell a victim to his suspicions and was condemned to a cruel death<sup>(1)</sup>, was already largely imbued with fable; but it is truth itself, compared to the Pseudo-Callisthenes, as it is termed, the work of an anonymous writer of Alexandria of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. In the 5<sup>th</sup>, it was rendered into the Armenian tongue and was rapidly diffused throughout the East.<sup>(2)</sup>

Thus it passed on to the middle ages and, in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, was translated into Latin by a priest called Leo, from the original Greek text which he discovered at Constantinople.<sup>(3)</sup> In the 12<sup>th</sup>, appeared another version with considerable deviations from the original, by Walter de Lisle, which obtained so high a reputation that it was made use of in schools and colleges and was, to a certain degree, reproduced by Lambert le Cor or Tor, in his epic poem, "Le Roman d'Alexandre."<sup>(4)</sup> When, somewhat later, Lamprecht produced the Alexander Lied, he mentions a French Roman by one Albert de Besançon as his immediate source. But he adheres, in general, so closely to the original Greek text, as to prove that he had either that or the Latin translation at hand.

<sup>(1)</sup> Life of Alexander by Quintus Curtius.

<sup>(2)</sup> Die Alexandersage bei den Orientalen. Leipzig 1851.

<sup>(3)</sup> A. Philippi; sur l'origine de l'Alexandréide du Clerc Lambert.

<sup>(4)</sup> Roman d'Alexandre par Lambert le Cor, edited by Michelaut.

The Pseudo-Callisthenes, of which Dr. Henry Weisman has given an excellent German translation (<sup>1</sup>), commences by informing us that Alexander was the son, not of Philip, but of the Egyptian prince and sorcerer Nectabanus, who enamoured of the queen Olympia had contrived, by his magic arts, to assume the form of the God Ammon and thus play the part of Jupiter in Amphitryon. This fable, he succeeds in imposing upon the king as well as the queen, and it is only when Alexander, in a boyish frolic, pushes him into the castle moat by which he receives a mortal wound, that, with his dying breath, he informs the astonished prince he is his father. (<sup>2</sup>)

Touched with grief and remorse, Alexander bears him on his own shoulders to his mother's apartments, who, though indignant at the discovery of the deceit practised on her, buries him with due honours, carefully keeping the whole a secret from the king.

The education of Alexander, the taming of Bucephalus, the first campaigns of Philip against the Athenians in which his son bore so prominent a part, the repudiation of Olympia by Philip and his marriage with Cleopatra, the indignation of the young hero at this union, his retreat from the court with his mother and the subsequent reconciliation of the royal pair, are all recounted with tolerable accuracy, save that Alexander himself plays the part of media-

(<sup>1</sup>) *Alexander-Lied. Urtext und Uebersetzung des Pseudo-Callisthenes.* Frankfurt, 1850.

(<sup>2</sup>) Lambert le Cor represents Alexander as pushing him in intentionally.

tor between his parents and gives his mother a very sensible lecture on the duties of female gentleness and forgiveness.

From this moment down to the expedition of Alexander against the Persians, there is no very striking deviation from historical truth; the captivity of the wife and mother of Darius and the murder of the unhappy monarch himself are described with great spirit, while the imagination of the writer is allowed but little range, save in the apparition of Jupiter Ammon to Alexander in his slumbers, the visit of the king, in the disguise of his own ambassador, to the Persian court, and his interview with Darius previous to his decease. The imaginary interview is brief and touching:

"And when Alexander stepped towards Darius, he found him half dead, and he lamented aloud and shed tears over him, and covered his body with his own mantle, and spoke compassionate words to him. Oh rise! King Darius, and reign over thine own nation. Resume the royal authority; I swear to thee that I speak truly without deceit. But who are those who have wounded thee? Tell me, for thou must have an avenger."

When Alexander had thus spoken, King Darius sighed, stretched out his hands to him and said: "King Alexander, never be puffed up because of thy royal dignity as I was once, who, because I possessed power like that of a God, fancied I could touch Heaven with my hand. Think of the future; for fate respects neither king nor kingdom; mercilessly it destroys all before it. Thou seest what I was, and what I

now am. When I am dead, bury me with thine own hands; I consign my mother to thy care and give thee my daughter Roxana as thy wife, that thou may'st have children to remember me."

It is a pity that the writer, who displays both skill and tenderness in many of his descriptions, should have omitted all notice of that pathetic interview between Alexander and the wife and children of Darius, which has furnished both history and painting with a scene so deeply touching.

The death of Hephestian is but slightly noticed, and the writer carries us at once to Alexandria where, from the loftiest tower of the city he had just founded, the monarch proclaims that there is one God, the visible and invisible creator of heaven and earth. These words sufficiently prove that the author of this singular Romance was a Christian. This God was not the God of Aristotle, who had taken no part in the creation of that matter which, according to the belief of the Stagyrite philosopher, was coeternal with himself.

The supernatural now assumes alarming proportions. We are told of huge wild women who, with claws two yards long, rush upon the Macedonian soldiers, seize and devour them before their sovereign's eyes. Alexander has them hunted and destroyed by dogs, of which he has great numbers in his camp. He is then assailed by colossal ants which carry off men and horses, a marvel by which even the hero is somewhat discomfited. To console him, a wide and rapid stream which threatens to impede his march is changed to sand, over which a bridge is

easily thrown. On the other side, new wonders await the fearless monarch. Myriads of Dwarfs, a foot and a half high, who play all kinds of pranks; a wood with golden apples, peopled by ferocious giants, of whom many are destroyed by his soldiers, though not without considerable loss; wild men naked and hairy, who sit immovable upon blackened rocks, but who, on a lovely maiden approaching them, seize and attempt to devour her and who, though they disperse when she is torn from them, soon return in immense numbers and attack the army with almost overpowering fury. An enormous fire, lighted by Alexander's command, sets them to flight. Further on, we find two golden images of Hercules and Semiramis, and other marvels less agreeable in the shape of enormous men, with six hands and with six feet, who would fain oppose the Macedonian's passage, but are quickly routed. But even these are less hideous than those who follow; human beings with dog's heads, and enormous crabs, which springing up from a lake on whose banks the Macedonians are encamped, seize men and horses and drag them down into the depths below. The next wonder is a river, full of trees which the soldiers are about to cut down, when they find themselves lashed by invisible hands, while a fearful voice bids them desist, on pain of being struck dumb. From this inauspicious spot, Alexander and his army proceed to another still more terrible, where the light has never penetrated and, after wandering a fortnight in Cimmerian darkness, reach the sea shore, where one of the men having killed a fish and found seven superb pearls in its body, Alexan-

der orders a glass cage to be constructed and has himself let down by an immense cord to the bottom of the ocean, in hopes of discovering further treasures. When he has descended about two hundred yards, he finds himself surrounded by a host of enormous fishes, one of which, seizing cage and king, after vainly endeavouring to break the former, throws both on dry land, where Alexander, despite all his courage, is not very sorry to find himself safe and sound. Lakes in which the water is like honey; horses with human faces; lovely syrens who pour forth sweet music; little men with one foot and tails, the prototypes perhaps of those conceived by Fourrier, though the author of the Pseudo-Callisthenes forgets to tell us if they have an eye at the extreme end of their singular appendix, like those imagined by the French utopist, and all sorts of extraordinary apparitions continue to present themselves till, at length, Alexander finds himself in India. Here we have his combat with Porus who is killed outright in the fight, and some very impressive discourses on the folly of ambition by sage Brahmins, which, as usual, produce little effect on the hearer.

The king next visits the Queen Candace, the description of whose palace reminds one of the Arabian tales. The chairs and sofas are of gold, their feet of beryl and rubies, the tables of ivory, the carriages of porphyry.

From the court of Candace, Alexander proceeds to a spot where he is told the Gods are wont to assemble. There reigns a perpetual mist, beaming with stars, through which Alexander dimly perceives a

human form with eyes flashing unearthly fire. This being tells him he was the ruler of the world who has become companion of the Gods, but adds that he is less happy than Alexander who will leave an immortal name to all ages. The hero's next expedition is to the Amazons, by whom he is graciously received; but soon after, on his arrival at Babylon, he is poisoned by Antipater, where the chronicle or rather romance concludes.

In the French, as well as the German poem, many of these wondrous adventures are omitted; but enough remain to satisfy the greatest lover of the marvellous. Lamprecht, as we have said, adheres pretty closely to the Greek or Latin text, save that, occasionally, he grafts the habits and manners of the 12<sup>th</sup> century on the original. Alexander, for instance, is knighted before his departure for Carthage, and kneels down, in humble prayer, on the ruins of the cities he has destroyed. The encounters with the dog-headed monsters and wild women are omitted, both in the poem of Lambert de Tor and of his German imitator, and, in their stead, we find that charming tale of the flower maidens which, in grace and beauty, excels any thing else in either French or German poetry of the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Then too, Alexander is conducted into the infernal regions, an adventure of which no mention is made in the Greek romance.

In poetical merit, the German poem is decidedly superior to its French model. The tone is more sustained, the verse more melodious and the metre more correct. It may be regarded, indeed, as one of

the gems of the Middle Ages: it is in short rhymes and in the low German generally used in the twelfth century in that country, and contains no less than seven thousand five hundred and fifty lines.

We append a translation of the "Flower-maidens".

We saw not far from where we stood,  
A wide-extending beauteous wood,  
With trees of varied hue;  
And as we nearer drew,  
There came, our ears to greet,  
Voices so wondrous sweet,  
The sounds of harp and lute;  
And song, that made us mute;  
The shade was soft and deep  
And lull'd the soul to sleep:  
Beneath the spreading bowers  
Were tender grass and flowers.  
In a verdant mead it lay,  
Bedight with blossoms gay;  
Water'd by many a brook,  
That gush'd from glen and nook,  
Refreshing clear and cool,  
Or spread in glassy pool.  
This wood, so beautiful and bright,  
Fill'd us with wonder and delight.  
The trees all tower'd in lofty pride  
The branches too, both dense and wide,  
Sooth'd and refresh'd the eye.  
The sun, tho' bright and high,  
Yet could not penetrate  
Their deep and solemn state.

We let our horses graze,  
 And turned a lingering gaze  
 Upon this region fair,  
 And all the marvels there;  
 For, in these forest glades,

We saw the loveliest maids,  
 Wiling away the hours  
 Amid the green-wood bowers,  
 Laughing, dancing, springing  
 And so divinely singing.

That, ravish'd by the sound,  
 We stood as if spell-bonnd!

. . . . .  
.

Forgetting all our sorrow,  
 Nor thinking of the morrow;  
 Wealth, splendor, rank, a monarch's lot!  
 Sorrow and joy, were all forgot!  
 And every grief, which we had known  
 From childhood; seem'd for ever flown!

Now would ye learn whence came the maids  
 Thus sporting 'neath the forest shades?  
 So soon as winter's icy sway  
 To summer's rosy touch gives way,  
 When all is fresh and bright and fair  
 And lovely blossoms every where

Begin to deck the world anew;  
 Then up spring flowers of fairy hue,  
 Of gorgeous crimson, snowy white,  
 Glowing with pure and dazzling light!

. . . . .  
.

Round as a ball, these summer posies;  
And, when the flower its leaves uncloses,  
To wondering eyes is then revealed,  
A living maid therein concealed  
In all her charms, scarce twelve years old.  
I tell you, as to me 'twas told;  
I saw them in their beauty rare,  
So gentle, maidenly and fair!

. . . . .

Never in women have I seen  
A fairer face a softer mien:  
Then, they were innocently gay,  
And, so enchanting was their lay,  
That never yet has human ear  
Heard accents such as they breathed here  
Yet, strange to tell, these beauteous maids  
Can live but in the green-wood shades!  
If once the sun's unclouded ray  
Should strike them, withered they would lay.  
Three months with these fair beings we pass'd;  
Why could not bliss so heavenly last?

. . . . .

The flowers began to die and fade  
And with them every forest maid.

. . . . .

Hush'd was the music of the rill;  
The birds' sweet warbling too was still.  
The woods had lost their verdant hue,  
And these bright beings — perish'd too. (1)

---

(1) The Alexander Lied, from verse 4888 to verse 5198.

---

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE CYCLE OF CHARLEMAGNE. — THE ROLAND LIED. — FLOS  
AND BLANKFLOS. — MALAGIS.

WHILE the fame of the Macedonian could inspire a poem in his honour, after the lapse of so many ages, in a land his foot had never trod, it would indeed be singular if the glories of Charlemagne had remained unrecorded in the realm that gave him birth. Yet, it was, after all, not in Germany but in France that first arose the lays and legends of which he is the hero. Perhaps this is not so very difficult to explain: France had early appropriated to herself the nationality of Charlemagne; in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, he was, in the popular feelings at least, no longer a German. It is only in our own days that more profound investigations and the progress of historical science have restored to the grandson of Charles Martel his true race and origin. Besides, though the poets of the middle ages have uniformly persisted in representing Charlemagne as warring with the Saracens, it was, in reality, the rebellious tribes beyond the Rhine against whom his victorious arms were generally directed and albeit, in

subduing and taming them, he rendered the most important service to the cause of civilization, the recollection of the severities which, in one occasion at least, he deemed necessary for the maintenance of his authority, may have served in some degree to tarnish his memory in the eyes of his countrymen. But in Provence he was remembered only as the mighty warrior, the irresistible conqueror, and even the disaster which attended his sole expedition against the infidels could not dim his fame. In fact, while his exploits have furnished France with the theme for an infinity of romans and romances, Germany has produced but a single poem which celebrates his name, the Roland Lied, itself only an imitation of the "Chant de Roncevalles". This lay rests on an event which took place in 708, and which was more momentous as destroying the prestige of Charles' invincibility, than from any importance of its own.

Eginhard relates that, in 707, an ambassador from the sultan of Cesarea, now Saragossa, came to Paderborn, or Padua, to solicit the aid of Charlemagne against the Emir Abderaman who had seized his capital and that, the following year, Charles set out for Spain to repulse the invaders. Navarre, Catalonia and Arragon soon bowed before his arms; but, just as he had taken Saragossa, he was called back by a new rebellion of the Saxons led on by the indefatigable Wittekind, and his rear guard, under the command of his nephew Roland, was attacked, in the dead of night, by a mountain horde which destroyed the flower of the army. "In this combat", says Eginhard, "Agenhard, master of the royal house-

hold, Austern, Count of the Palace, and Roland, prefect of the Britannic frontier, were killed with many others."

Such was the famous day of Roncevalles which became the source of some of the most glowing romans of the middle ages. Robert Wace, in his romance of Rollon, tells us that, at the battle of Hastings, the Norman troops were preceded by a knight, or bard, called Taillefer, singing the exploits of Roland and his companions in arms.

Taillefer ke moult ben cantoit,  
Sor un cheval ke tost andoit  
Devant a sen alloit cantant  
Di Charlemagne et di Roland.

The work which most contributed to the celebrity of Roland was a Latin chronicle, long admitted as authentic, and attributed to Turpin, archbishop of Rheims, contemporary of Charlemagne. It has since been determined as of not earlier date than the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The song itself is supposed to have been written by Geraldus, the tutor of William the Conqueror. The oldest copy was found in our own Bodleian library. (1) The German poem differs somewhat from its French original, the spirit being more christian and somewhat less chivalric. The following is a brief summary.

The Emperor Charlemagne, warned by an angel, proceeds, with his twelve paladins and a mighty host, to Spain to combat the infidels; but the crafty Saracen affects not only willingness to retire, but to receive baptism in the hope that Charlemagne will retrace his steps, with the greater part of his host,

---

(1) Published by Fr. Guenin. 1856.

and that the rest will easily fall beneath his arms. - He sends to Cordova, where the emperor is lying, ambassadors with rich treasures, bearing crosses in their hands. They behold the fields covered with tents on which float countless banners. On one side, are knights engaged in martial sports, on the other bears and lions in grisly contest; they hear the sound of sweet voices and the clanging of the lute, while fair damsels wander to and fro, and tame eagles spread their wings above their heads, to shade them from the sun. In the midst of all, sits the emperor himself, his eyes beaming with kingly light and every glance proclaiming the sovereign and the hero. The ambassadors cannot gaze on him, so dazzled are they by the splendour of his countenance. Terrible to his foes, affable to his friends, fearful to the hardened sinner, merciful to the penitent, Charlemagne is no less dreaded than beloved. On receiving the offers of the infidel, Charles consults his principal paladins as to whether or not it is advisable to accept them. Some, Roland among the rest, are for absolutely refusing them, but the opinion of the majority prevails, and it is resolved that an envoy shall be sent to the heathen sovereign to discuss the matter more fully. Roland offers his services; but, these being declined, proposes his father-in-law Ganelone who, by no means desiring the office, curses in his heart him to whom he owes it. To refuse, however, is impossible. Charles gives him his glove which he lets fall, a bad omen, and then sets forth with seven hundred men upon his mission. The cunning Saracen soon perceives the secret feelings of the am-

bassador, and avails himself of the discovery to urge him to betray the cause he is employed to serve. The task is not difficult. The traitor, whose heart is already ulcerated with envy, yields to the temptation. He advises the Saracen monarch to keep up the deception, until Charles has retreated with the greater part of his host and then, pursuing his original project, to fall suddenly on the rest and cut them to pieces. Laden with rich presents, the faithless emissary returns to his confiding master and, under pretext of devotion to his cause and affection for his gallant son-in-law, induces the emperor to intrust the government of Spain to Roland. The young hero sets off accordingly, but, ere arrived at his place of destination, he is suddenly attacked by countless hosts of infidels and, despite a desperate resistance in which both the commander and his troops perform prodigies of valour, numbers prevail. Roland sees his little band fall around him till, at length, finding all his efforts vain against so enormous a disparity of force, he sounds his horn, the gift of the angels, with so vigorous a blast, that it reaches the camp of the emperor who, we may suppose, is lying at no great distance. Charles hastens to the rescue; but ere he arrives, scarcely one of that valiant band is left alive. Roland himself, covered with wounds, has sunk dying on the blood-stained ground, after vainly striving to break, against the rocks that surround him, the sword which till then had so faithfully served him, lest it should fall into the hands of his enemies. They are about triumphantly to seize it, when Charles appears. The Saracens are put to flight and their

king is slain. Due honors are paid to the remains of the fallen heroes; the traitor Ganelon is punished as he deserves, and the Christians, sad though triumphant, leave the fatal field.

The Roland Lied is in a dialect somewhat similar to the low German and not very easy of comprehension. A portion is to be found in Schiller's "Sammlung alter Deutscher Sprachen." The original manuscript is at Heidelberg. We subjoin a brief extract. Charlemagne has set off for his own land confiding the army to his nephew Roland:

Those of one heart  
From each other must part;  
Their grief was great,  
They mourn'd their fate.

The emperor returned to his land:  
The rest of the gallant band  
Gathered, neath Roland's standard then:  
Twenty thousand gallant men,  
As brave as ere the earth had trod;  
Forth they went to serve their God.  
None could keep them from the strife;  
They did not care for limb or life.

They are surrounded by the infidels:

Now when the heroes found  
That the heathens were around,  
They pray'd their priests to prepare,  
To shrive and bless them there.  
Then when secure and calm,  
With prayer and with psalm,

With penance and with vow,  
 And knees that humbly bow,  
 Down on the grossy sod,  
 They had raised their souls to God,  
 Tasted the heavenly bread,  
 And drank the blood Christ shed  
 T'obtain eternal life,  
 They armed them for the strife.  
 They were all glad and light,  
 As on a bridal night:  
 They had counted well the loss,  
 And taken up the cross. (1)

The poem of Flos and Blankflos recounts the adventures of the maternal ancestor of Charlemagne; it dates from the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and is ascribed to Conrad Flecke. It is borrowed from the French; but it appears doubtful whether the original text has really come down to us. The subject is briefly as follows: Flos, or Flore, the son of a pagan king, loves and woos a young Christian maiden who has been taken prisoner, while accompanying her mother on a pilgrimage to the holy land, and has been brought up with him from childhood. This portion of the poem is charmingly written, although the mutual love of the children seems rather precocious for their years:

Despite the children's tender youth,  
 They loved with fervour and with truth;  
 When sent to school, at early day,  
 They ever lingered by the way,  
 Regardless of the warning chimes;  
 They kiss'd each other fifty times.

---

(1) Ruolantis Lied, herausgegeben von W. Grimm. 1838.

And, when they were at home,  
 Then would they haste to roam  
 In a garden large and fair,  
 They were ever happiest there.  
 They'd linger all day long  
 Listening unto the song,  
 Which thrush and nightingale  
 Poured on the listening gale.  
 Or else the hours would pass,  
 Close nestling on the grass,  
 Shaded by rosy bowers,  
 And covered thick with flowers.  
 Then Flos would fondly say:  
 Grant me, sweet queen, to-day  
 Your love, as once of yore;  
 I treasure it far more  
 Than does a mother mild  
 A dear and only child.

Rather singular expressions for a boy of five years old.

The king discovering the secret is furious against the fair captive and is dissuaded from extreme measures only by the entreaties of his wife. His son he sends forthwith to Mendow or Mantua, under the pretext of study, while Blankflos is sold to some travelling merchants who carry her to Babylon. Flos, on his return, is informed that his beloved is no more; but his mother, touched by his despair, reveals the truth; he instantly resolves to seek her, though at the furthest ends of the earth. His father, finding all remonstrance useless, at length consents to his departure, and his mother, with maternal tenderness, presents him with a magic ring and goblet, to aid him on his way. He sets off for Rome where, as he is informed,

Blankflos in the first place has been conducted, and thence, discovering her fate, sets sail for Babylon. Here, he soon finds his beloved one who has been purchased by the Babylonish admiral and confined in an almost inaccessible tower, guarded by the sternest of sentinels.

Flos, however, has already learned the secret of moving the hardest heart. He wins the goaler by rich presents and persuades him to let him be carried in a basket

Filled with posies,  
Summer blossoms, dewy roses,  
Flowers and grass from glen and grove,  
Such as maidens dearly love!

to the apartment of the captive.

Who can picture the delight of Blankflos when she thus unexpectedly beholds her beloved one! The portrait of the two, as they stand side by side in their young beauty, is pleasing enough, and we would reproduce it, had we not already cited so many of the same tenour. It may perhaps be asked why we do not select others which portray the feelings and passions of the actors in these various dramas instead of the colour of their eyes or the splendour of their garments. In reply we must remind our readers that we have already insisted on the materialism of the early German poets. They are essentially realistic, and while dwelling with almost tedious minuteness on the aspect of external nature and revelling in descriptions of maiden beauty and knightly magnificence, they pass rapidly over scenes which would supply material for a whole romance of modern days.

In the bliss of reunion, the lovers forget the lapse of time and are surprised by the furious admiral, whose naval command on the Euphrates does not probably occupy much of his time. The unhappy pair are seized, bound and condemned to be burnt alive; their youth, their beauty plead for them in vain, when, at the very moment of execution, the magic influence of the ring softens the hearts of their judges and they are restored to liberty and life. Flos returns with his beloved to his native land where his parents, too happy to embrace once more their long lost son, accede to his marriage with Blankflos. He adopts the Christian faith and they live together in connubial bliss till the respectable age of one hundred, when they die the same day, leaving an only daughter, Bertha, the maternal ancestor of Charlemagne and herself celebrated in many a popular lay of the middle ages.<sup>(4)</sup>

Malagis is the early history of the son of Duke Bune of Edgermond who figures in the traditions of the cycle of Charlemagne as a magician. This poem, the author of which is unknown, has never appeared in print; the original manuscript is at Heidelberg. We subjoin a specimen.

#### DUKE BUNES' MARRIAGE.

It happened, once upon a tide,  
 Duke Bune Edgermont sought a bride;  
 And she whom he did take to wife  
 Was lovely in all her way and life, &c.

<sup>(4)</sup> Müllers Sammlung altheutscher Gedichte. Berlin 1784.

The marriage day arrives and all the monarchs of Christendom, the Kings of France, England and Sicily are invited to the wedding; but, just as they are about to set out for church,

Thus spoke Drusana: for Christ's sake!  
 One little prayer I fain would make;  
 Send, my good lord, from far and near  
 For all the poor and wretched here.  
 Duke Edgermont replied thereto:  
 Dear heart, that presently I'll do.

And, accordingly, they were all summoned far and wide:

And when they had come, one and all,  
 The duchess went into the hall.  
 Welcome, she said, good friends and true;  
 Most heartily do I love you,  
 And one and all shall go with me,  
 To church that every one may see.

This does not however please the duke; he tells her:

Summon your kinsmen; 't is their right;  
 Besides they're sumptuously bedight  
 With silks and furs and fit array,  
 And send the beggar brood away.  
 Nay, by my Christian faith and life,  
 Sir duke, I ne'er will be thy wife,  
 If these do not before me go;  
 When we are married, you shall know  
 Why it is my desire and will.  
 The matter pleased the duke but ill;  
 He thought on what the world would say,  
 Yet could not bear to answer nay.

So.

The poor all went, before, behind:  
The one was deaf, the other blind;  
A third was sick, a fourth was dumb;  
Yet close to her she bid them come,

To the great discomfiture of the poor duke. But scarcely have they entered the church when,

Amid that strange and motley crowd  
A mighty voice thus spake aloud;  
Go on Drusane, God to thine aid!  
The honour thou to him hast paid,  
Shall stand thee well in after days,  
In honour, glory, bliss and praise.

Now, when Drusana heard the sound,  
Straightway she knelt upon the ground;  
Thank'd God for all the grace he meted  
And humbly every prayer repeated;  
Then lo! a radiance all divine,  
As from the heavenly throne did shine,  
And every wretched beggar there  
Became, at once, both whole and fair.  
Their garments too were bright and new,  
So that they dazzled quite the view:  
The blind could see, the cripple walk,  
The deaf could hear, the dumb could talk;  
And all a wondrous music made,  
Some on the harp and viol play'd;  
Another most divinely sang.  
Of trumpets there was clash and clang, &c.

The party, beggars and all, on leaving the church, sit down to a sumptuous repast, when the duke claims the fulfilment of his wife's promise.

Friend of my heart, she thus replied,  
When you were wooing me as bride,  
I humbly from my soul implored  
That you might ever seek the Lord.  
God heard my prayer; for it was pure;  
Therefore, I summoned all the poor.  
Yes, I will serve him all my life,  
Through him I am your happy wife.

Our attention must now be directed to another description of poetical composition, to those legends which formed the delight of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, and of which the heroes united the valour of a Tancred with the piety of a Godfried. Few however are worth remembering. Of these the most striking are the holy Alexius and Heraclius. The former is of German origin by Conrad von Würzburg. Alexius, son to a noble Roman, in the time of Theodosius the Great, weds a lovely maid called Adriatica; but when seated at her side, at the bridal feast, surrounded by light and splendour, he is struck by the recollection of the vanity of all earthly things and resolves to enter the cloister.

Returning the ring of betrothal to his amazed bride, he throws off his rich attire and wanders forth, a pilgrim to the holy land, where he remains twelve long years, enduring all kinds of hardships and sufferings. At length he returns poor and worn, but will not make himself known. He kneels daily at the door of the church where his father, mother and bride perform their orisons. He receives their alms and tells them of Alexius whom he says he has met at Palestine and, to the tearful enquiries of the still

loving and widowed bride whether he yet thinks of her, he replies "yes, he remembers the ring he has returned you and his father and mother, but he has sacrificed all for eternal life. — Did he intend returning? — Not that he had heard!" The situation is dramatic; but little use is made of it; and time passes on till at length feeling his end at hand, Alexius writes his melancholy story and lies him down at the door of the temple to die. As he draws his last breath, all the bells ring forth a solemn peal; the people rush into the church, among them his mother and his bride; they behold the lifeless corpse stretched at the door, the paper yet grasped in his hand; they bend over and examine it; the truth flashes on their minds; they need not the written testimony; the long lost lies dead before them!

The Heraclius, by Otto von Frising, has an historical foundation and is a translation or imitation of a French poem of the same title, by Gauthier d'Arras, which obtained considerable success in the middle ages. It was dedicated to the good Count Thiebault of Blois; "le plus vaillant ki soit di Island jusqu'à Romme".<sup>(1)</sup> Both the French work and its German imitation commence in rather a dry style; but this speedily changes and is succeeded by amorous adventures, startling incidents and romantic situations. The hero, the real Heraclius, is one of

---

(1) *Heraclius, deutsches und französisches Gedicht des 12. Jahrhunderts.*  
Herausgegeben von Maasman.

the grandest and most touching figures in history. The first portion of his life is in itself an epic poem. Summoned, from his command in Africa, by the voice of the people indignant at the cruelties of Phocas, he was elevated to the throne whence he hurled the tyrant, thus avenging the murder of the unfortunate Maurice; but his position was beset with perils. The treasury was empty, the army disorganized and Palestine in the hands of the Persians. It had been betrayed to them by the Jews, in revenge for the unwilling baptism to which they had been subjected by Phocas, who summoning them to Jerusalem on pretext of affairs of importance, had them all dragged to the font, as they arrived, by his brutal soldiers. The victorious Persians had ravaged the country, broken open the church of the Resurrection, built by Constantine on mount Calvary, and carried off the true Cross preserved there. Heraclius availed himself of the universal indignation excited by this outrage to rouse the dormant spirit of the nation; assembling a numerous army and well manned fleet, he directed his course to the borders of the Black Sea. The fierce tribes along its coasts he won over by presents and fair words. To the most powerful chief among them, he promised the hand of his beautiful daughter Eudoxia, first inflaming his heart by the sight of her portrait. Then, entering Assyria, he gained a complete victory at Nineveh, and pursued the Persian monarch Cosrœs from point to point, till the wretched king was compelled, in the disguise of a peasant, to seek refuge in the hut of one of the meanest of his sub-

jects, where he soon after perished the victim of a domestic conspiracy.<sup>(1)</sup>

The entry of Heraclius into Constantinople, on his return, was indeed a triumph: his car was drawn by four white elephants with trappings of gold and precious stones; flowers and incense were strewn upon his path, and the cross his arms had regained was borne aloft before him. But it was a still prouder and more touching moment when, some months later, he proceeded to Jerusalem, mounted, with the holy cross on his shoulders, the steep ascent of Calvary, while thousands of awe-struck spectators gazed on him from below, and presented the treasure to the bishop who, awaiting him at the summit, restored it to the church whence it had been taken. For a moment, the ancient triumphs of the Roman empire appeared about to revive, and to Heraclius seemed reserved a part more glorious than that of Adrian or Trajan. But these bright hopes were only transitory. That fearful power which, eight centuries later, was to destroy the last vestige of Roman Empire in the east, had already begun its terrible march of conquest. Ere many years, Heraclius beheld the fairest of his possessions, Syria, Palestine, Alexandria, Memphis, become the prey of the successors of Mahomet. To preserve that cross he had once so triumphantly regained was all that seemed left him. With breaking heart and faltering step, he once more ascended

---

(1) See Gibbon and Histoire d'Attila et de ses fils par Mr. A. Thierry. Vol. 2.

mount of Calvary; the Patriarch Sempronius, with unrepressed sobs, presented to him the sacred deposit and the emperor bore it to Constantinople. The termination of his reign was disastrous and humiliating; a sad lesson to human grandeur!

Here it is in the real events themselves that lie the romance and poetry we are wont to attach to the name of Heraclius. Once more Legend is less interesting than history.

---

## CHAPTER XIV.

DECLINE OF ROMANTIC POETRY.— RUDOLPH OF HABSBURG.— RISE AND PROGRESS OF THE MEISTER-GÉSANG. — ROSENBLUT. — MICHAEL BEEHEIM'S FABLES.— DIDACTIC POETRY AND SATIRES. — DER WELSCHEN GAST. — FREIDANKS BESCHEIDENHEIT. — KÖNIG TYROL. — WEINSDEKE. — BONA. — HUGO VON TRIMBERG. — FRIAR AMIS. — THE NARRENSCHIFF BY SEBASTIAN BRANT. — GERARD MINDEN.

WITH the extinction of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, the golden age of chivalric poetry may be said to have passed away. When, after a long period of anarchy and civil strife, Rudolph of Habsburg was at length elected sovereign in 1272, the Minnesingers hailed his accession to the imperial throne as the commencement of a new and brighter era for their art. But they were sadly mistaken. Rudolph was, in all respects, a truly great character; but he had neither taste for poetry nor time to encourage it. He was too continually occupied by the duties of his empire, by continual struggles with rebellious barons and by those daily and hourly cares in which the convulsed and lawless condition of the realm involved him, and the minstrels who thronged to his court re-

turned poorer than they came. The termination of the crusades, likewise, tended to the extinction both of the romantic spirit they had fostered and the poetry they had inspired. A great change had come over the world within the last century. It had not become less martial, for warfare was still almost the only path to honor or distinction; but new interests, of a more engrossing character, had sprung up to dispute the reign of chivalry. Commerce which, except in the republics of Italy, had hitherto played a very subordinate part in the affairs of the world, began to develope itself. Towns, hitherto insignificant, had attained considerable importance. As early as the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the German cities, whose wealth had been silently but gradually increasing, felt the necessity of closer union to enable them to resist the power of the nobles then at its culminating point. Lübeck led the movement and, in 1241, formed a bond with Hamburg, Bremen and almost all the towns of the north of Germany. On the Rhine, the principal cities soon followed their example and the mercantile and commercial classes, so long despised, began to exercise an important and daily increasing influence on the world. (1)

But the developement of trade is necessarily unfavourable to the growth of poetry, at least when it obtains exclusive possession of the public mind. Beneath the pressure of material interests, the lofty dreams of the imagination, the bright visions of fancy, are too often crushed and withered; and if, in Italy,

---

(1) Menzel, Geschichte Deutschlands. Vol. 1st. p.

they survived, flourishing even in the very bosom of commerce, it was because the spirit of chivalry, fostered by the memory of past glory and the necessity of perpetual conflict, had found its way to the hearts of the industrial population itself, and the citizen of Florence, like the citizen of Athens, was at once a merchant, a poet and a soldier.

But in Germany, where the last echoes of those old poetic traditions which had once inspired the warrior on the field of battle, or lent new charms to the banquet, had died away, where the romantic strains of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries had never been more than exotics, blooming only in the halls of the great and noble, it was far otherwise. There the increase of trade, the diminution of feudal wealth and splendour, nay, even the new direction given to men's thoughts by those wondrous discoveries and inventions, destined to aid so powerfully in the work of civilization, threatened for a while to destroy poetry itself. When, therefore, the harp fell from the grasp of the high born minstrel, it seemed destined to remain henceforward ingloriously mute and, however lowly the hands that lifted it from the ground, however rude the harmony to which it was attuned, Germany still owes a debt of gratitude to the *Meistersängers* who, once more, wakened its strings.

These simple and untaught efforts of rude and humble minds among the lower orders, have frequently been the subject of contemptuous pleasantry. True, they are generally dry and uninteresting, and the rhymes in which they are composed often little better than doggrel; but we must not forget that, by

their means, poetry hitherto confined to one order alone, now first began to develope itself among other classes of society and to assume an independence of thought and variety of form to which it had hitherto been a stranger<sup>(1)</sup>.

How the institution of the Meistersängers first arose, we cannot exactly discover. By some authors they have been attributed to Frauenlob, but of this there is no satisfactory proof. All that is certain is that they flourished in their full glory in the middle of the fifteenth century, and that, towards the end of the sixteenth, the history of their origin had sunk into oblivion. The towns of southern Germany, Mainz, Augsburg, Nürnberg and Ulm were their chosen resorts. In some, the association was composed of a single set of workmen, all belonging to the same trade, none else being admitted, while in others, it was formed of all the restless joyous spirits who had any love of verse or taste for music. When the business of the week was over and Sunday had arrived with its quiet and repose, the members of the humble society would assemble in the schoolroom, festively ornamented for the occasion, and there, surrounded by attentive and admiring listeners, commence the grand business of the evening. The member who had most distinguished himself in the previous occasions by skill, either in verse or music, and the best singer were called forward and crowned by the president with a wreath of flowers; an ornament was then hung round their

---

(1) Grimm, über den alten deutschen Meistergesang.

neck, and each member hastened to produce any contribution he had made since the last meeting. These, if approved, were carefully written down in a large book in text hand; the assembly then joined in chorus, and when the favorite psalms or hymns had been sung, the honest burghers and their wives and daughters, who seem generally to have been present on the occasion, separated and returned to their homes. "Such", observes Dr. Villmar who dwells at some length on the subject, "were the amusements of Sunday evenings and holidays among our good and honest forefathers of the olden times. Might they not now be revived in some measure with advantage?" (1)

Two of these Meistersängers have escaped oblivion, Beeheim and Rosenblut. The compositions of the latter, who lived about the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, are not destitute of a certain homely wisdom and obtained considerable popularity in their day; and despite the decay of all poetic feeling, the language of Rosenblut, Beeheim and their contemporaries presents a considerable advance over that of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. We will cite only two strophes:

He who is made to find fortune and friends,  
He is at home wherever he wends;  
But if good luck reject the man,  
Nothing can help him, do what he can.

On earth, we seek for nothing so much  
As honor, or what we hold as such;  
When we have all for which we sigh,  
What do we then? lie down and die.

---

(1) Villmar's Geschichte der deutschen Literatur. Vol. 2d. p. 200.

What can all the essays on the vanity of human ambition add to these homely lines of honest Rosenblut?

His whole career, so far as we can learn, was one of unbroken ease and tranquillity. Far different was that of Michael Beeheim, a most prolific if not very distinguished poet, the history of whose life is probably more interesting than any extract from his works. He was born in 1416; his father was a weaver, and he himself was brought up to the same trade and carried it on successfully enough till his 24<sup>th</sup> year, when the passion for poetry began so completely to engross all his thoughts, that he threw aside the loom and shuttle to resume them no more. Count Conrad of Würzburg, the feudal lord of the district in which he dwelt, remarking his mental superiority, took him into his service. He followed him to the court of Bavaria and, from that moment, devoted himself entirely to poetry; but he had the good sense never to be ashamed of his lowly origin or of the humble occupation in which his youth had been passed. How often, amid the sufferings and sorrows of his later life, when oppressed by want and poverty, did he look back, with a sigh, to those hours of comparative happiness and regret that he had sacrificed the certainty of a tranquil existence for the deceitful prospect of glories he was never destined to attain. Even, had his poetical genius been such as he imagined, the day for winning minstrel fame at the court of kings and princes was over. Besides, he had unluckily married, while he still worked at his trade, and had a family to support. Had he been really a high born noble, he would probably have

troubled himself little about these encumbrances. Like Ulrich von Lichtenstein, he would have left them to get on as they might, while he amused himself in singing the praises of his lady; but Beeheim was, after all, only a Burgher, and his heart clung to his wife and children with plebeian fondness. Still he remained almost cheerful amid all his trials, faithful to what he believed his vocation, poetry.

Conrad of Würzburg dying, Beeheim tried his fortunes at the court of the Margrave Albrecht von Brandenburg; but here, nothing save disappointments awaited him. On one occasion, when admitted to sing before the court, he ventured to accuse the nobles of pride, luxury and other vices. Such audacity might have been borne from a Wolfram von Eschenbach or a Walter von der Vogelweide, but from the lips of a low-born weaver, it was unpardonable. With one voice, the indignant barons declared that, if he had nothing better to say, he should be flung into a well. The poor minstrel ventured no reply; he withdrew sad and dispirited. It fared still worse with him, sometime afterwards, when taken prisoner by the burgers of Rothenburg, who were then at war with the Margrave. He was thrown into a dungeon, fed on black bread and water, and obtained his liberty only by swearing not to return to the Margrave's service till the feud should be ended (<sup>1</sup>). In obedience to this oath, he spent some time in wandering through Germany and, at length, sought the protection of Christian of Denmark who was

---

(<sup>1</sup>) Chronicle of Rothenberg.

related to the Margrave. That prince was then in Norway, and thither Beeheim was sent by the queen who, it seems, was a lover of the “gaie science” and had welcomed the wanderer with a courtesy and kindness to which he had long been a stranger. By the king he was likewise well received and returned with him to Denmark, having narrowly escaped shipwreck on their homeward voyage. After a residence of some length at Christian’s court, Beeheim, learning that the strife between his former lord and the Rothenburgers had ceased, bade adieu to his royal patron and returned to his old master. Somewhat later, he repaired to the court of Alberic of Bavaria and this perhaps was the most tranquil, and on the whole the happiest period of his life, if we are to judge by his verses. But necessity or taste prevented Beeheim from lingering long in the same place. After a while, we find him at the court of Ladislaus, the youthful King of Poland, who shewed him considerable favour; but he, somehow or other, contrived to get into disgrace and, in 1457, was obliged to seek another asylum. This time, he betook himself to the court of the Emperor Frederick and followed him in many of his campaigns. He had hoped to have ended his days beneath his protecting care; but his unbounded love of satire lost him the goodwill of his imperial master and again he had to depart. Happily, he found a friend in the Pfalzgraf Frederick and, at his castle at Heidelberg, where a certain degree of literature was cultivated, he finished his existence, an existence which had been a perpetual struggle with want and misery and, in which, he

had often been compelled to resort to the basest flattery to win and retain the precarious and capricious favour of his temporary masters (1).

Michael Beeheim's productions are almost below mediocrity. We present one extract which will probably suffice for our readers; it is the commencement of a long and rambling poem on sorcerers, wizards &c., written in the merest doggrel and in the most unconnected manner; but the opinions are, in many respects, enlightened beyond his age:

Here will I, Michael Beeheim, make  
Open and clear for dear truth's sake,  
How heretics and sorcerers vile  
Deceive poor human beings below;  
And seem as they were, all the while,  
Virtuous and good, and so beguile  
Full many to eternal woe!

He goes on to condemn still more severely those who believe in the stars, or think that one day is better or more fortunate than another, declaring that

This is a greater evil still;  
For God has given us all free will,  
That our own works, or ill or well,  
May doom us unto heaven or hell (2).

It was in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century that the Meistersängers really flourished; but the institution continued, through languishing, till the end of the

(1) Gervinus, Geschichte der deutschen Poetie. Vol. 2d. p. 210.

(2) Deutsche Lieder von von der Hagen.

17<sup>th</sup>, amid all the calamities of the thirty years' war: nay, at Ulm, it survived even the changes which the French revolution effected throughout Europe, and Villmar assures us that, as late as 1830, twelve old singmeisters yet remained who, after being driven from one asylum to another, sang their ancient melodies from memory in the little hostelry where the workmen, in the evening, met to drink and jest together. In 1839, four only were yet living and, on the 21<sup>st</sup> October, these veterans assembled with great solemnity, declared the Meistersgesang for ever closed, and presented their songs, hymns, books and pictures to a more modern musical institution, the "Liederkränze" of Ulm, with the wish that, even as the Meistersängers had, for centuries, invited the patriarchs of the church to hear their lays, even so the banner of the "Liederkränze" might wave for centuries, and their strains charm the latest posterity (<sup>1</sup>).

While the Meistersängers continued to pour forth their strains with hearty good will and undiminished confidence in their own powers, new descriptions of poetic literature grew up beside them, fable, satire, didactic poems, none of very high excellence in themselves, but important as marking the intellectual evolutions of the German mind and its gradual passage to new phases of thought.

No writer exercised greater influence over his contemporaries than Ulric Bona or Bonerius whose "Edelstein", a collection of fables and moral tales

---

(1) See Villmar. Vol. 1st. p. 246.

had the honor of being the first German work printed after the celebrated Bamberg Bible, being published in 1461, a tolerable proof of its popularity. Bona was a preaching friar at Berne and is frequently mentioned both in 1324 and 1349. We present the following extract from the "Edelstein".

### THE PARSON.

There was a Parson young and sage,  
As any Parson of his age;  
Yet was he harsh and proud of mood,  
And deem'd his voice a priceless good;  
He lov'd to sing, as we shall see,  
Thinking none sang so well as he;  
And tho' his song, as it appears,  
Was not so pleasing to the ears  
Of all his flock, it mattered little  
For him, he did not care a tittle.  
  
Now once, it chanced that for his pleasure  
He sang without or stint or measure  
Upon the altar; when there came  
A heavy groan! a good old dame  
Had lost her ass three days before;  
She almost wept, her grief was sore.  
  
Now when the parson heard her moan,  
He spoke to her with kindly tone;  
He thought his voice caused her emotion,  
By calling forth her deep devotion,  
And asked if he should sing again?  
"No, no! it only gives me pain."  
But why? explain, what mean your sighs?  
I'll tell you all, Sir, she replies;  
Why I so wept in hearing you;  
My ass, a beast both good and true,

The wolf has eaten; my regret,  
The time's so short! I can't forget:  
And when you sang, oh, lack-a-day!  
It was so like the very bray  
Of my dead ass, that ere you ceased,  
I thought I heard the poor deceased.  
The vain young parson blushed with shame;  
She call'd his voice by its right name;  
But yet he thought it rich and true  
As asses generally do.

Not inferior in popularity to Bona's fables, was the "Renner" of Hugo of Trimberg, a schoolmaster in the little village of Thurlstadt near Bamberg. Honest Hugo did not commence the business of authorship till he had attained the ripe age of fifty. His "Renner" so called, as he tells us, because it was intended to run through the land, evinces keen observation of men and manners, together with a good-humoured irony which may, in some degree, explain the favour it enjoyed. It treats of love and marriage, of matrons and maidens, the latter of whom, he tells us, have "long hair and little judgement"; of masters and servants, youths and old men, giving here and there a sly hit at the follies and foibles of humanity. His work, printed at Frankfort on the Main in 1549, interpolated with modern corrections, has become extremely scarce, nor do we know of any later edition. The "Renner" is interspersed with fables. We give some extracts from one of those which appears to us the most interesting. Its inordinate length, two hundred lines, sufficiently accounts for our not citing it *in extenso*.

## THE WOLF, THE FOX AND THE ASS.

The wolf, the fox and ass one day  
Resolv'd to go to Rome to pray;  
The way was long, their vows sincere,  
And when the city they were near,  
Thus spoke the fox: since with his grace,  
The Lord hath brought us to this place,  
I would propose, as time doth press,  
Each to the other should confess,  
Ere on the pope we set our eyes.  
Thou speakest well, the wolf replies,  
For the poor pope has little time.  
Let us confess each secret crime;  
Let's fix the penance and implore  
The grace of God to sin no more.

The wolf then confesses that, in a fit of virtuous indignation, he has eaten an unnatural sow who abandoned her little ones and, has afterwards, devoured the pigs themselves to boot, of course to save them from starvation.

What though the pigs you chanc'd to kill,  
I cannot see it was so ill,  
Replies the fox; you did it all  
From goodness, as will oft befall.  
For what more pitiful to see  
Than a poor orphan family!  
Yet shall you kneel before our cloister,  
And then repeat a Paternoster,  
Although the sin would call for less.  
But now a crime I must confess  
That heavy on my conscience lies,  
And often draws forth bitter sighs.

The fox's transgression consists in having killed (out of the purest philanthropy) a noisy cock and his hens which were the torment of the whole neighbourhood. The wolf, remembering how easily his compère had let him off, returns the politeness by assuring him that he has really committed no sin at all, but to tranquillize his conscience, desires him to eat no meat on Fridays for a month or two. The poor ass is then summoned to confess his sins. After ransacking his memory he can recollect nothing, save having stolen a few straws from his master's boots to appease his hunger one bitter winter's day :

Now this is all I have to say;  
Be pitiful to me, I pray,  
And let my penance be but light.  
How, cried the wolf, hear I aright?  
Thou ruthless murderer! death and ban!  
Thou hast destroyed that wretched man,  
His two poor feet were frozen, he  
Died from the cold most certainly;  
There is no pardon, wretch, for thee,  
No hope of mercy, to be brief,  
For such a murderer and thief;  
And saying this it came to pass,  
He seized and ate the wretched ass.  
Penance like this is oft imposed  
By those who have our conscience glozed.  
They who 're not rich enough to buy,  
Will all in vain for pardon try,  
And oft for sins of no dark hue,  
Will lose their soul and body too,  
As with our donkey was the case.  
The fox retained the wolf's good grace.

We need scarcely point out the inferiority of this lengthy and somewhat ponderous production to the *chef d'œuvre* of La Fontaine, "Les Animaux malades de la Peste", which it recalls, both being drawn from the same source, one of the old French fabulists of the thirteenth century; but it is remarkable as proving how deeply the abuses which had crept into the Church of Rome had disgusted all thinking minds, and how daring was the satire already launched against the Papal See.

The same spirit pervades "Friar Amis" by Streicher, the hero of which is an Englishman; he dwells in England, at a place called Tims, and by his sarcastic propensities and, perhaps, by some neglect of his clerical duties, (for we can scarcely imagine him a very devout pastor,) has roused the anger and incurred the jealousy of his superior, the bishop, and that dignitary is resolved to find some pretext for depriving him of his gown. Accordingly, he summons him to his presence and inquires if he can tell him the depth of the sea? Amis without a moment's hesitation replies six million seven hundred fathoms! The bishop, thunderstruck by his assurance, does not venture to contradict him. Sundry questions of the same description follow till, the bishop, enraged at finding all his efforts to puzzle or intimidate the curate vain, determines to set him a task which shall baffle even his skill to execute Bidding the servant call a donkey, he commands the parson to commence his education immediately, adding that if it is not completed to his satisfaction in a week his cure shall be given to a more skilful instructor. Any other man would have abandoned the matter in despair. Not so Amis. He

coolly replies that he shall be in readiness and sets about executing his novel task. The appointed day arrives; the bishop, on his throne, awaits the issue with triumphant impatience. The priest appears with his ass, before whom he places the volume. The animal, whom the crafty Amis has taught during the week allotted him, to turn the pages with his nose by placing turnips between them, recommences his wonted exercises and, arrived at the end of the book without finding anything, sets up a most vociferous bray.

You see, did parson Amis say,  
This is the ass's curious way  
Of uttering the letter A.  
He's not got further on than this,  
He don't pronounce it so amiss.

The bishop, in despair, gives up the game and leaves Amis to his own devices. His reputation, as the wittiest man of his day, soon spreads through Germany, and high and low throng to pay him their court. Unluckily, this unexpected homage turns the poor curate's head; from a quiet, prudent, well-conducted man, he becomes dissipated, extravagant and profligate and, at length abandoning his sacred calling, sets out to view the world. He begins by selling indulgences, already a great source of profit and against which, even in those days, more than one honest voice was raised in indignation. Amis provides himself with a skull which he declares is that of St. Brandon and, seeking the curate of a village on his road, asks permission to preach in his church. It is

granted; Amis ascends the pulpit, his skull in his hand, and presenting it to the congregation, declares that he has been commissioned by the Saint to build a monastery and chapel in his honour for which he solicits the contributions of the faithful.

Oh! give in charitable wise,  
Open the gates of paradise;  
But if your secret souls within  
You still conceal some cherished sin,  
Then to approach me do not dare,  
The saint will scorn your gift; beware!

Of course, every one hastens to present his offering and the cunning priest leaves the church with his pockets full.

But Amis is tired of clerical duties and longs to appear in a new character; so throwing aside the saintly garb, he assumes that of a gallant knight and rides away on fresh adventures. In due time he reaches Paris, "the rich city", and thanks to his gorgeous apparel and knightly mien, obtains admittance to the king to whom he presents himself as a painter of great renown and a mighty wizard to boot. The monarch determines to try him in the first of these capacities and proposes to him to paint the royal palace which is sadly in want of repair. Amis undertakes the task, but, previous to commencing it, warns the king that his wonderful productions can be visible only

To men of pure and noble race;  
To Bastards they'll present no trace.

Having shut himself up for a month, the artist throws open the doors of the apartment com-

mitted to his skill, and the king enters; he looks around and sees nothing; but, remembering the painter's warning, he affects to admire the various beauties of the artist's pencil, praising his glowing hues and flowing outlines. All the knights, lords and ladies in attendance, most of whom perhaps feel some secret misgivings as to their legitimacy, vie with each other in their admiration, and the lucky impostor is dismissed loaded with costly gifts. From the court of France Amis proceeds to Lorraine where, assuming a new character, he presents himself as a doctor promising to cure all the sick in one week, if the duke will only permit him to draw twenty ounces of blood from the arms of every vicious inhabitant of the city. The duke enquires how he is to find them out? Amis replies, that would present no difficulty, for the wicked alone are afflicted with illness. This proclamation proves sufficient to effect a perfect cure in most cases; but what we do not quite understand is that we are told the gold poured in profusion into the impostor's pockets; perhaps it was given him in order to propitiate his good graces. When this method of procuring money fails, Amis has recourse to another: he assumes the garb of a mendicant friar and, in this new disguise, obtains succour and hospitality from all the saintly dames in the neighbourhood. Among others is a pious lady under whose roof he passes the night: he says upon an excellent capon the remains of which are placed in a cupboard which however it appears is not very well secured. Amis rises while all the other inhabitants of the castle are ~~are~~ in sleep: he purchases another capon which he

puts in the place of that which formed his supper the evening before. The servant, amazed at beholding so astonishing a resurrection, runs to inform her mistress: the lady falls on her knees in wonder and reverence before a man who evidently brings a blessing wherever he comes. Amis takes care to make the most of this little adventure by declaring whatever is given to him will be returned double to the giver, a hint which, as may be supposed, does not fail in producing the desired effect. Our curate seems to have the gift of preaching in so high a degree that none can withstand his pious eloquence. One of his fair penitents presents him with a magnificent piece of stuff, of course for the use of his church, and he is carrying it off in triumph when unluckily the lady's husband happens to return from the chase; not being quite so devout as his wife, he immediately suspects the trick; Amis is forced to relinquish the prize, but not without declaring that God will fearfully punish the knight's contempt of his holy ministers; in fact, before many minutes have elapsed, the whole of the precious treasure is one blaze of fire; Amis has concealed a piece of lighted tinder in the stuff. After this feat, the parson returns to England where he turns merchant, gives magnificent dinners and contrives to win golden opinions by the splendour of his entertainments and the apparent sanctity of his life.

We must not pass without a brief notice a few works of a didactic character somewhat anterior in date to those just mentioned. *Der Welsche Gast*, Freidank's *Bescheidenheit*, Lehren or lessons of the King Tyrol of Scotland to his son, and lastly

one under the not very intelligible title of "Winsbekken", consisting of counsels from a mother to her daughter. To the first of these productious, (1) by an individual called Thomassin von Zirklaere, probably of Lombard origin, judging from his name, and written in 1216, Gervinus has condescended to devote thirteen pages; (2) yet, though it may seem presumptuous to question the opinion of one of the most celebrated of modern critics, we cannot help thinking that his delight at discovering something, rather above the common order in the midst of the arid intellectual desert of German literature in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, has somewhat misled his judgement. We humbly confess that we can perceive, in this vaunted work, little more than certain elementary precepts, very useful to a nation just struggling out of almost infantine ignorance, but otherwise not much calculated to excite admiration. Nay, even the best of the aphorisms appear to us often very contestable. For instance, when the author tells us that love makes the wise man wiser and the fool more foolish. Does not experience prove every day that love makes fools of the wisest? And if, as a general rule, it increases the folly of the simpleton, does it not, on the other hand, often inspire him with good sense to which he has hitherto been a stranger?

The "Bescheidenheit," (3) or as it signified in the German of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, worldly wisdom and

(1) *Der Welsche Gast*, herausgegeben von Buchert. 1852.

(2) *Gervinus' politische National-Literatur*. Vol. 1st. p. 103.

(3) *Freydank's Bescheidenheit*, herausgegeben von Grimm. 1843.

honesty united, is a work of pretty much the same description as the "Welsche Gast". It has been attributed to Walter von der Vogelweide, on account of a certain depth of thought and elevation of sentiment occasionally displayed in the reflections on church and state, which occupy the latter part of the volume and which certainly claim attention. Still, when a modern writer, generally distinguished no less by his impartiality than by his keen critical acumen, (<sup>1</sup>) calls it the "worldly Bible" and declares that German literature does not boast another such treasure, we again venture to maintain that the eulogy is exaggerated. Doubtless, these works must be judged by the standard of the age to which they belong, not that of our own day and, in the absence of all intellectual productious af a higher order, even these may appear precious, as the smallest patch of verdure in the wilderness is an oasis to the eyes of the wearied traveller. One merit, indeed, these writers may fairly claim, that of having first led the way to the close analysis and patient observation of men and manners, which have since become the characteristic traits of German literature and, still more perhaps, of our own.

The lessons of the King Tyrol of Scotland to his son and the Winsbecken display much practical wisdom, and are not quite devoid of poetic feeling. The

---

(<sup>1</sup>) Billmar, Geschichte der deutschen Literatur. p. 261.

(<sup>2</sup>) Lehrgedicht von König Tyrol und seinem Sohn.

(<sup>3</sup>) Freydank in Schiller's Thesaurus. Vol. 2d.

father bids his son remember that truth and honor are better than wealth; that the world betrays its slaves; and the mother entreats her child to persevere in the path of virtue and cherish virgin modesty as the fairest of garlands.

A work, far more celebrated than any which have hitherto occupied our attention, is the "Narrenschiff," or Vessel of fools, written in 1488 by Sebastian Brant, a man of considerable learning who filled the office of imperial councillor and syndic at Strasburg, where he died 1581.

Few productions have obtained greater popularity than this satire, although the excessive praises bestowed upon it seem to us somewhat hyperbolical. True, the plan displays considerable ingenuity and imaginative philosophy. Brant portrays an ocean of fools, the waves of which sparkle with phosphoric light and seem to the eyes of the simpletons with which the world is peopled, to offer every imaginable delight. In those transparent waters, each fancies he beholds the object of his ambition; the miser, mountains of gold and gems; the drunkard, casks of sparkling wine; the idle and voluptuous, bowers of roses with lovely maidens ready to return them kiss for kiss. All precipitate themselves on board the ship prepared to bear them, over that ocean of bliss, to some unknown shore and which, constructed by fools, is of course built all awry with every thing in the wrong place.

The design is admirably sketched and, if the filling up of the picture had been equal to the outline, the "Narrenschiff" might take its place among the most

philosophic and imaginative works of any age. As it is, although the mine has not been worked out as fully as its riches might have rendered possible, the author has produced a work of no common order. Under a somewhat coarse envelope, which tends unfortunately to repulse a modern reader, there are infinite powers of satire, and every page displays a knowledge of human follies and frailties unsurpassed by Swift himself. Yet, despite all this and the wholesome lessons of practical virtue and wisdom it inculcates, the language is so commonplace, the wit often so vulgar, the details so wearisome and the length so inordinate (it occupies eight hundred pages of thirty lines each), that we believe few, save a German, would have the courage to attempt its perusal. The portraits of a dozen fools or so, skilfully drawn, may have interest enough, but who can have patience to examine one hundred and twelve? That the "Narrenschiff" should have been the delight of the good Bürgers of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, is natural enough. It is, in all respects, adapted to the taste of the age and, independent of its intrinsic merit, the declamations against the Roman Catholic clergy and the sly hits at nuns and monks would have almost sufficed, in themselves, to secure its popularity. If any thing had been wanted to complete its success, it would have been supplied by the well known preacher Johann Geiler of Kaisersberg, who actually selected it as theme of a series of sermons delivered in the church of St. Alten at Strasburg, in 1478; while Erasmus conferred on it the still higher honour of citing it in some of his works.

Though produced almost in the very infancy of printing, it passed rapidly through several editions. One of the most costly has been preserved; it is full of illustrations in which the artist, while reproducing the ideas of the writer, lends them the embellishments of a fancy far more rich and varied than that of Brant himself. It is dated 1565 and may be found textually reproduced, together with Geiler's sermons, in the often cited Kloster (part 2<sup>nd</sup> vol. 1<sup>st</sup>).

The idea of this voluminous work was suggested to Brant by that of an Italian, Jean Baptiste Spagnuoli, a native of Mantua, a satiric poem tolerably wearisome, but which enjoyed such celebrity, both in its own day and in the age immediately following, that it served for a text to numerous commentators. Among these was our friend Sebastian who was well versed in the Italian language.

We had intended translating some verses of the Ship of folly for the benefit of our readers; but on second thoughts we desist, conscious that far from conveying any correct impression of the work itself, it would serve to place it in an unfavourable point of view. It is as a whole alone, that it can claim admiration.

Another popular writer was Gerard Minden who paraphrased, rudely enough, Æsop's fables. Less, or as some of our readers may be inclined to think, more fortunate than Bona, his works were long completely buried in oblivion, and it is only within a few years that a fragment of them has been discovered.

These homely essays are, as we see, of little value in themselves; but they served at least to cherish the taste for intellectual culture and prevent, if not

its degradation, at least its utter extinction, rendered but too imminent by the civil and religious conflicts of which a considerable portion of Germany was the theatre from 1419 to 1434. Poetry, indeed, there was none, save in the dark and fearful dramas enacted in many parts of the land. True, it was in Bohemia that the flames of war raged with the greatest fury, but the reaction was felt throughout the whole empire. The execution of John Huss, in flagrant violation of the most solemn promises, had roused the indignation of his brave compatriots and, when in 1419, the fierce Zizka of Trocznow famed for his exploits in Poland and his hatred alike to priests, by one of whom his sister had been seduced, and to the German race whom he regarded as the natural enemies of his native land, summoned the Bohemians to revenge the murder of their pastor and apostle, forty thousand men rallied round his standard. All the excesses to which religious fanaticism, outraged affections and burning passions can impel the human mind, were committed by the enraged Hussites, and the martyr whose memory they invoked, would have shuddered in his tomb, could he have beheld the outrages committed in his name. Convents and monasteries were ruthlessly plundered and burnt. The royal castles were despoiled of all their treasures; the paintings and frescoes torn from the walls; the gardens devastated and the trees cut down, while the priest Mathias Toczenixe, raising an altar in the middle of the street, gave the communion to all who asked it, from morn till night. Prague, indeed, soon came to its senses and sought to make terms with the Em-

peror Sigismund; but he would listen to no propositions. Meanwhile Zizka continued his excesses, burning alive all the priests who fell in his way. In justice, however, it must be said that the Catholics had previously committed similar cruelties on some Hussite preachers who had ventured across the frontiers. From 1419 to 1432 did this fearful storm of war devastate Bohemia. Zizka, indeed, died in 1424, leaving a command that a drum should be made of his skin and carried before the troops to affright his enemies; but Procop Holy, the boldest of his disciples, supplied his place. Twice only, during this long period, did the Hussites meet with any resolute resistance and, both times, from those of the feebler sex. The Countess Catherina of Meissen defended her castle with such skill and determination, that the besiegers, weary and disheartened, retired from before the walls; while the young Agnes of Rosenberg, unappalled by the death of her father and the menaces of the furious assailants, held out with a courage, which excited the admiration of the stern fanatics themselves and induced them to offer her and all her retainers a free passage. Preceded by her father's bier and surrounded by fifty faithful vassals, all who remained, of whom scarcely one had escaped a wound, the youthful heroine, in deep mourning attire, rode through the astonished host of enemies. At length, in 1433, the council of Basle put an end to the fearful conflict; the strength of all parties was exhausted, and peace was once more restored to the distracted land. (1)

---

(1) Menzel's Geschichte der Deutschen. p 275 to 290.

Here we have a theme which might have kindled, one would think, the poetic spirit of poet or minstrel, if any yet remained on German soil. Yet we have not been able to discover a single lay either in execration of the murder of Huss or of the crimes of his avengers, nor even in honour of the heroines above mentioned who distinguished themselves by their courage in these troubled times.

---

## CHAPTER XV.

RISE AND PROGRESS OF THE DRAMA. — THE DEVIL OF THE  
MIDDLE AGES IN TALE AND LEGEND.

THE 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, so barren in poetic genius, were still of no common importance in the literary history of Germany; for it was then that the drama, hitherto almost unknown in that country, burst into life. We have already noticed the compositions of the nun Hroswitha, as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century; but these, being in the Latin language, can scarcely be said to belong to the native stage. It is a singular fact, both in ancient and modern times, that it is in religious sentiments the theatre has taken its rise. In Greece, from the very earliest ages to the days of Solon, religious feasts were accompanied by dances and performances. It was in Gaul and the south of France that the modern drama may be said to have originated. The inhabitants of these countries long retained many of the practices derived from paganism and, among others, a marked predilection for certain games and dramatic farces, the degenerated remains of theatrical representations. The church had in vain

endeavoured to abolish these relics of an abhorred doctrine and, at length in despair, she determined on effecting her purpose by means less apparent but equally sure; she substituted subjects derived from the old or new testament for those of mythology. Processions, removal of relics, ceremonies combining religious awe with dramatic effect, such as those of the three Kings at the feast of the Epiphany or the three Marys at Easter, supplied the place of the gorgeous but obscene games of paganism.

In the imperial library at Paris, there is a manuscript containing at least forty dramas or miracle plays in honour of the Virgin, and several founded on chivalric legends, all of later date, showing the gradual transformation of the public taste.

In England, miracle plays seem to have been introduced in the 13<sup>th</sup> century or earlier. Indeed we find that a show, as it was called, founded on the story of St. Catharine was represented in the town of Dunstable within the first twenty years of the 12<sup>th</sup>-century, and a mystery, entitled the ‘‘Harrowing of Hell’’, was acted in 1350.<sup>(1)</sup> In Paris, dramatic performances do not seem to have been introduced until about the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, while in Germany the first mention is towards the end of that period. The mysteries which, there as elsewhere, formed the rude commencement of the national drama, were at first always represented in churches or cathedrals. Later, however, when the clergy, scandalized by

---

(1) Hallam's hist. of literature in the middle ages. Vol. 1st.  
p. 220.

the occasional introduction of jests or language little fitted for such sacred precincts, insisted upon their removal, they were performed on wooden stages, uncovered, in the public market places.<sup>(1)</sup> In Passion week, in particular, they were celebrated with great pomp; and the death, burial and resurrection of Christ were represented to crowds of spectators who, far from being shocked at the introduction not only of the Saviour but of the Father himself under the guise of an old man with a long beard, such as we may still see him in many of the old mosaics and pictures of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, were thrilled with reverential awe and deep emotion; so much is there of convention in our best and holiest feelings.

The first German mystery of which we have any detailed account, dated 1340, is called the life of Jesus and is divided into ten acts; each act containing several scenes, each representing one of the events in the career of the Saviour, his birth, baptism, etc. The original manuscript of this mystery is alternately in Latin and high German and, in comparing it with the fragments of earlier mysteries, it is evident that a considerable progress had already been attained. Though the drama comprehends a space of three years, there is a certain unity in the design. Its length, indeed, rendered its performance in one afternoon impossible; but that was of no importance, as it was continued from day to day until it was concluded. We are not told whether this drama was represented in the church, or in the temporary theatres above mentioned;

---

<sup>(1)</sup> Bürg's Geschicht des deutschen Theaters.

but we are led to infer the latter from the fact that, at the commencement of the manuscript it is expressly stated that the angels and demons must have a peculiar attire; whereas, within the church walls, the ordinary priestly costume alone was adopted. (1) The exact nature of these costumes we cannot now ascertain, though from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, indeed, drawings of those adopted are frequently appended to the manuscript. We subjoin the following extract.

When Christ 'beholds Andrew and Peter, he thus addresses them :

Peter and Andrew, hear my call  
 And follow me; henceforth ye shall  
 Leave off this useless trade and vain;  
 Ye shall be fishers, but of men.

*Andrew.*

Peter, the truth we oft have heard  
 That the Messiah hath appeared,  
 That Christ who'll guide us on our way.  
 For us hath dawned a blessed day!

In the second act, when the adulteress is brought before Jesus, the Jews thus address him;

Master, thy advice we crave;  
 This woman's sin is deep and grave.  
 Moses, whose law we all obey,  
 Bade without mercy we should slay  
 Adulteresses with staff and stone:  
 And this vile woman she is one.

(1) Mone's Geschichte der deutschen Schauspiele des Mittelalters.

Vol. 2d.

Jesus writing on the sand;

He who is free from sin, alone  
Let him first cast the fatal stone.

After Christ has been seized by the Jews, John carries the fatal tidings to Mary;

Mary, holy mother! hear;  
I bring sad tidings to thine ear,  
Tidings most dark to all, to me!  
But doubly, doubly sad to thee!  
They 've seized our much lov'd Lord at last,  
In fetters they have bound him fast.

*Mary.*

Oh! fatal news! my son, my son!  
What, alas! can he have done?  
He never yet committed sin,  
It doth not dwell his breast within!  
Come, women; aid my steps, I pray;  
For I will go this very day,  
And see my son, ere yet too late,  
And whatsoe'er may be my fate.

The childhood of Jesus, which was written about the same period, is much shorter and in one act.

This piece, however, is far less dramatic than the former, and belongs rather to the Christmas dramas than to those of Easter. It has, however, one important feature. Here appears the first trace of that merry personage who plays so important a part in the dramas of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the court fool. In the 7<sup>th</sup> scene he enters and announces to Herod the arrival of the three Kings of the East, adding sundry observations which bear a faint tinge of the wit and humour regarded as the necessary attri-

butes of that personage. He mocks Herod for the cowardly terrors which induce him to murder so many helpless innocents to ensure the destruction of one. Herod starts up in fury to fell him to the ground; but the fool makes a spring and escapes through a side door. He reappears, to inform his master in the same mocking tone that the three Kings are departed and will not return, and only laughs when Herod threatens him with the gallows. There is one difference, however, between the fool of this drama and those of later date; the humour of the former is more keen, more biting. "There is something", observes Dr. Mone in his history of the drama of the middle ages, "almost diabolical in it and, indeed, it is in this sense that he is to be regarded as a sort of personification of the Devil in human form, opposed to the holy influence of the Redeemer."

The religious Comedy differs in some aspect from the mystery. Hitherto the life of Christ, or the circumstances connected with it, had formed the sole subject of these performances and had been treated with a gravity and solemnity befitting the awful nature of the theme; now, another element is blended which, different as it may be from comedy in our sense of the word, was yet regarded as such in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, because it introduced a personage who, in their eyes, was an object no less of mirth than of horror, the Devil.

In the old German legends, from which probably the writers of the mysteries drew their idea of Satan, although they considerably modified it, he is represented as still more ludicrous than terrible. Despite

his horns, tail, fangs, claws and fire, he is generally outwitted. Nay, he is frequently portrayed as a very harmless good-natured personage, always ready to aid the human race and demanding their souls as his reward, not for the purpose of tormenting them, but simply to keep him company in the gloomy regions to which he is doomed, and, in particular, extremely curious as to all that is going on in the upper world. On one occasion, the legend tells us having heard a great deal of the riotous manners and habits of the Lanzknechts, he became desirous to judge of them for himself and, accordingly, sent his confidential servant Beelzebub to earth to carry down a dozen or so, as specimens. Beelzebub, accordingly, entered an alehouse where he knew these gentry were usually to be found, and concealed himself behind the stove till he should find an opportunity of pouncing on and carrying off his prey. The Lanzknechts were seated round a table, drinking and quarrelling as usual, so that Beelzebub thought he was sure of them; but as, amidst all their wild oaths and fierce merriment, they perpetually exclaimed "God bless the glass", the poor demon found himself baffled, this sacred name paralysing all his powers. At length one of the party, who had killed a fat hen that day, said to his comrades: "Go behind the stove, take the poor devil, and then we will roast him for dinner." Beelzebub, believing he was the devil in question and trembling in every limb, pierced a hole through the stove and, escaping from his perilous confinement, got back, as quickly as possible, to his haunts below, where he gave Lucifer so fearful a description of the

manners, habits and conversation of these wild rovers, that he declared that, far from trying to get hold of them, he would never admit one of them into his dominions, preferring, as the old writer gravely tells us, "peace and quiet to any increase in the number of his subjects." (1)

On another occasion, having endeavoured in vain for thirty years to sow discord between a happy couple, he was about to abandon the attempt in disgust, when a mischiefmaking old woman of the neighbourhood promised to ensure his success, on condition that he would give her a pair of new shoes. The Devil gladly acquiesced and both punctually fulfilled their engagement; but the dame, not finding the shoes to her liking, seized the poker and assailed Lucifer with such violence, that he was only too happy to make his escape as quickly as possible. Old women indeed seem, generally speaking, more than a match for him. Wearied with the life of a bachelor, he determined, we are told, to enter the bonds of matrimony and came up to earth with the purpose of seeking a wife. With laudable foresight, he chose an elderly woman, thinking his saddened air and furrowed features might alarm a young one. But, although he was a model husband, his better half contrived to torment him so effectually that, in despair, he fled from her and took refuge in a desert where, meeting a travelling doctor, he offered his services to enter into the bodies of his patients and then allow himself to be expelled by the exorcisms of the physician, on condi-

---

(1) See *Gauber und Gauberei*, von G. C. Herst. p. 200.

dition of sharing the profits. The bargain was struck, and at the first trial the Leech defrauded his partner of five thalers; so, the next time, Lucifer resolutely refused to yield to his adjurations. In vain the doctor tried all his skill could teach him; Lucifer was immovable till, at last, a bright idea striking the physician, he exclaimed; "Devil, thine old wife is below and claims thee as her husband; she has brought with her a letter from the court of justice; you must accompany her directly and give an account of your conduct." The poor Devil, terror-struck at this announcement, rushed forth and fled to his own dominions. Here we recognize the well known tale of Belphegor and madame Honesta.

The clumsiness and naïveté of Satan, in all these legends, are rather unaccountable in a personage generally deemed so astute, and this tendency to divest both supernatural types and historical figures of almost all that is terrible, leaving only the debonair and the grotesque, is, as we have already seen, one of the prevailing traits of German tradition. Indeed, in many of those tales which formed the delight of the middle ages and obtained among the people devout credence, Satan plays the most honourable part and pays the penalty of his overweening confidence and also, it must be allowed, of his own vanity. Thus, in a legend of the Tyrol, we find that, as the celebrated doctor Paracelsus was taking a walk near Innsbruck, he suddenly heard a voice utter his name: looking round, but seeing no one; "who calls me?" he exclaimed; "I", replied the voice, "release me from this pine in which I am shut up." — "Who is I?" — "I am

called. the Evil One", was the answer, "but unjustly, as I will prove, only let me out!" — "And how am I to let you out?" enquired Paracelsus. — "Look attentively at the bark", replied the prisoner, "and you will see a spigot marked with the sign of the cross; pull it out, and I am free." — "Well", said the wily German, "you must first listen to my conditions, you must grant me two boons; the first, a medicine which will cure every malady; the second, a tincture which will convert every thing into gold. But who will assure me that you will keep your word?" — "On the faith of the Devil", replied the other in a solemn tone, an oath not much calculated to inspire confidence. But Paracelsus took his penknife, cut out the spigot and lo! an immense black spider crawling out ran down the tree and was seen no more. In another instant, on the spot where it had vanished, stood a tall black man, wrapped in a red mantle. "Wait a minute", said he with a friendly grin and struck the rock with his wand; it sprang open and the Devil disappeared. In an instant, however, he returned and, true to his promise, placed in the hand of the young philosopher two little bottles, one yellow, the other white: "Here", he said, "is what you desire. Do you go with me to Innsbruck? I intend to carry off the exorciser who shut me up here, and who has no idea that I am at liberty."

Here was a dilemma; Paracelsus well knew what fate awaited the unlucky exorciser if once he fell into the clutches of his enraged foe and, as his sympathies were naturally on his side, he determined

to save him from the threatened danger. So, wisely speculating on that quality which, it would seem, is common alike to the inhabitants of the upper and lower regions, amour-propre, he observed: "The exorciser must be very potent, to have shut you up in such a narrow space. I do not think that, of your own free will, you could change yourself into a spider again".—"You are mistaken there", replied the Devil. "I will believe it, when I see it", said Paracelsus. The Devil's pride was piqued. In another instant he had transformed himself into the loathsome insect and crawled once more into the tree! Ere he had time to turn round, the spigot was in the bark and the Devil again a prisoner.<sup>(1)</sup> There, the legend assures us he has remained ever since; but in this it is evidently mistaken. There are few of us who have not reason to know that he is again at liberty and doing as much mischief in the world as ever, or perhaps a little more, to revenge himself for the trick that was played him.

But by none was Satan more cruelly duped than by a certain blacksmith who figures in a legend worth recounting. Though the Germans, like the Indians, attached the idea of something diabolical to the trade of a smith, this being the favourite occupation of the Gnomes and Cobolds, their traditions generally represent him as saved from that perdition which is supposed to await the supernatural race.<sup>(1)</sup> This more charitable supposition was possibly de-

---

(1) Das Kloster. Vol. 3d. p. 301.

rived from Persian tradition. The Persians were reduced to despair by the cruel tyranny of Zohak; the smith Goar fastened his apron to the top of a pole as a signal for all who loved their country to rally around him. The call was not in vain. The revolt found a leader in the gallant Feridun who dethroned Zohak and reigned in his stead and, from that moment, the smith's apron was consecrated as the national standard and every succeeding prince adorned it with gems.<sup>(1)</sup>

In Germany, in the Middle Ages, the smith's apron was believed to be endowed with the power of saving the soul from the clutches of Satan, as the hero of our legend triumphantly proved. He had become so impoverished as not to have a morsel of coal or iron left and was reduced almost to starvation. One day, as he was lamenting his hard fate, a stranger sumptuously attired and mounted on a coal-black steed, stopped before his cottage-door and desired him to shoe the animal. The smith replied that he must try and borrow some iron, for he had none of his own — "Is that all you want?" said the stranger; "I'll soon help you; sign this paper with your blood". The smith obeyed, pricking his finger for the purpose, and when he left the chamber, the court-yard was full of iron and coals. From that moment, all smiled upon him and, ere long, he found himself one of the wealthiest tradesmen in the neighbourhood; but his heart failed him when he thought of the source of his riches and of the terrible reckoning that awaited him.

---

(1) Herbelot Bibl. Or. V. 2, p. 616.

At length, another stranger riding a humble little ass stopped before his door and requested his services. When the ass was shod, he told the smith he could not pay him, for he had no money, but, if he would form three wishes, they should be granted, whatever they were. The smith, accordingly, desired a chair, from which no one who sat down on it could rise; a pear-tree from which no one who climbed it could descend, and a sack, out of which no one who was once in, could escape against the will and pleasure of the possessor. The stranger, who was no other than St. Peter, went on his way. When the time for settling the dreaded account arrived, and Satan appeared to claim his prey, the smith very politely invited him to sit down; then, taking a huge horse-whip, he flogged him till, no longer able to endure the torture, he flew out of the window, chair and all. Unwilling to trust himself a second time in so dangerous a neighbourhood, Satan dispatched one of his emissaries to seize the troublesome smith, but in vain! The unwary demon, unwarmed by the experience of his master, suffered himself to be lured to the top of the pear-tree, where we suppose he still remains, while another, sent on the same hopeless mission, tumbled through the open cellar-door into the sack which was open to receive him. At length, Satan finding all his efforts to get hold of this refractory subject unavailing, resolved to wait quietly till the hour should arrive, when neither pear-tree, chair nor sack could save him from his grasp. It came at last, for the smith died. The Devil, who had been anxiously awaiting the event, rejoiced exceedingly,

and prepared all his torments to receive his guest with due honors. But the cunning fellow contrived to baffle him after all. Remembering the wondrous powers attributed to his apron, he bade his friends tie it round him as he breathed his last and then, with unheard of impudence, presented himself at the gates of heaven for admittance. Of course he was sternly refused; but, as the door chanced to be a little ajar, he contrived to throw his apron through the gap. "What do you mean by flinging your dirty apron into paradise?" angrily enquired St. Peter, who guarded the sacred precincts. — "I will fetch it out", replied the smith meekly, "if you will only allow me to enter a minute." The too confiding apostle consented, when the smith seating himself upon the apron exclaimed: "now, I sit upon my own property and no one shall drive me away", and there he remained.<sup>(1)</sup> But it is time to return to the main subject of our chapter.

The most ancient of the "Teufelsschauspiele" or Devils plays was found in the library at Carlsruhe; the handwriting is almost illegible. It is called "the birth, death and burial of Jesus" and is in three acts.

In the first act the Jews demand guards to watch the grave of Christ; Pilate replies that to watch a dead man is absurd, they can do that themselves. He is, however, persuaded and four men are sent to the tomb. Then follows the scene during the slumber of the watchers. Those upon the tower strive to rouse their sleeping brethren; they hear the dogs

---

<sup>(1)</sup> Das Kloster. Vol. 4th. p. 147.

bark, announcing danger, but their efforts are vain. Meanwhile Christ passes through the gates of the sepulchre and enters purgatory. The scene in purgatory, we find from a marginal observation in the manuscript, was to be "very horrible and touching". The devils, seeing their hoped-for prey escape them, are roused to fury. They feel that the patriarchs will be freed from their grasp, that they will thus be forced to own that not sin itself could alter or destroy the providence of God. Lucifer summons all the demons to his presence, to determine the means necessary for their defence. He informs the assembly he has already destroyed that Jesus who pretended to be the son of God and, as a proof, points to the soul of Judas which he has in his possession. Satan, however, who here plays a secondary part and who has some doubts on the subject, enquires where is the soul of Jesus, which somewhat embarrasses the devil. Meanwhile, Christ enters the dark recesses of Limbo and awakes Abel. The first victim of sin is the first who is redeemed by the Saviour of man. Lucifer advances to bar the passage, but in vain; David, Christ's maternal ancestor, advances to meet him; Adam and Eve follow the latter of whom once more confesses her sin, the cause of all the misery that has since befallen the world. Lucifer is seized and bound, and the souls of the patriarchs are led forth rejoicing. Puck, a mischievous demon, mockingly taunts Lucifer with his weakness and he is compelled to acknowledge that the salvation of man was unknown to him; that the birth of a child by a virgin had not even attracted his attention. Christ com-

mands the archangel Michael to lead the souls of the patriarchs to paradise. The third act brings us once more into the earthly scene. Easter-day has dawned, the watchers on the tower sing a morning hymn which, at length, rouses the sleeping guard; what is their dismay on finding the grave empty! The high priest loads them with reproaches which, however, serve only to rouse their indignation and induce them to declare they believe in Jesus's divine mission. The Jews perceive, at once, that unless they are somehow or other silenced, all is lost. Caiaphas changes his tone; he offers them money and promises to intercede for them. Pilate summons them to his presence and commands them to tell him all that has passed. He threatens them with the severest punishment; but, at length, is induced to forgive them. Here closes the first part of the play; the second "the Devil's game" seems to have been generally reserved for the following day. The "Diablerie" commences with a view of the infernal regions; on a throne of glittering brass, sits Lucifer still in the chains in which the Saviour has bound him. At his side is an empty wine cask, an emblem of the souls who have been freed from his dominion. Lucifer holds a soliloquy in which he acknowledges that Christ must be the son of God and pictures his own rage and despair. He summons the inferior demons and bids them hasten to earth and, by drawing mankind into their snares, avenge the humiliation he has endured.

On their expressing some doubts of success, he tells them that they have only to go to Lübeck, that they will there find victims enough for the trouble

of catching them; a bitter satire on the inhabitants of that town which then stood in no great favour with the rest of Germany. The demons, accordingly, rush forth once more and, in an incredibly short space of time, bring back a covey of souls of all classes, merchants, bankers, tradesmen, tailors, goldsmiths, peasants &c. all of whom are compelled to confess the sins of which they have been guilty. Satan, meanwhile, has also returned dragging with him one victim only, but that one is worth all the rest put together, for it is a priest! Here we see the commencement of those satires against the clergy which fill so many dramas of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In this instance, however, the priest has the best of the conflict, for he disputes and argues so loudly and apparently so well, that Lucifer declares he cannot endure it, and commands Satan to let him out again. The deliverer of the epilogue then mounts the barrel, informs the audience that Christ has risen, urges them to a godly life and ends by singing the Easter hymn.

We have already observed there is reason to believe the drama of which we have spoken was performed, not, as those in the preceding century, in a church or cathedral, but in a temporary theatre erected for that purpose in the market-place. We have, however, no very clear account of how these theatres were constructed, until the commencement of the 15<sup>th</sup> century when we find a rude plan of one affixed to a Passion drama. There we see the spectators were placed very much in the same manner as at present, but as the art of shifting scenery was as yet unknown, they had to change their

positions according to the part of the stage on which the representation was going on at the moment. This, of course, occasioned considerable noise and confusion and greatly lengthened the performances. The actors did not, as now, retire behind the scenes when no longer needed on the stage; they remained, quietly standing by, till their turn came and then advanced to play their part. There was no attempt to imitate reality; the want of machinery, the rudeness of the decorations would have rendered all delusion impossible; so the managers were wise enough not to attempt it. In a drama entitled, "Christ on the mount of Olives," the mountain was represented by a cask. Yet, many things were brought before the eye of the spectator which we should now be content to leave to his imagination. For instance, when Judas hangs himself, the Devil is present at the operation, urging him on; and a long rope, falling from the tree into hell which is on the other side of the stage, indicates that his soul is doomed to eternal perdition. (1) The souls of the blessed, who are frequently brought on the stage, were attired in white; but no optical illusion being possible, the effect must have been ludicrous rather than awful. When the drama, as was frequently the case, lasted several days, it was generally so arranged as to present a different scene each day, heaven the one, hell the next &c. We cannot but admire the patience of the German audiences of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, when we

---

(1) Mone's Geschichte der Schauspiele des Mittelalters. Vol. 2d. p. 99.

learn that these performances frequently commenced at eight in the morning, continuing all day, with the exception of the sacred hour of dinner. It is true that, like the tragedies of the ancient Greeks, they were performed only on great religious solemnities.

The performances of the middle ages in Germany, however, do not seem to have been confined to the subjects above mentioned. Contemporary history was likewise occasionally introduced, and we are assured that Joan of Arc was actually brought on the scene in 1430 at Ratisbonne, in a piece entitled the "Conquest."

The theatre, such as we understand at present by that term, did not exist in Germany till the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; till then it consisted of rude wooden stages generally uncovered and erected in the market places; on these were represented the innumerable comedies and dramas of Hans Sachs and his less known precursor, Hans Folz.

At length, about 1630, the wealthy city of Hamburg gave the initiative by erecting a theatre of no mean order which speedily became the most important one in Germany. Plays, sacred and profane, followed each other in rapid succession and the improvement in the construction of scenery was so great that, in 1666, a temple of Solomon was produced which cost 16,000 thalers (£ 2,500) and was so exquisitely finished that it fetched nearly the same sum when afterwards sold to a wealthy Englishman.<sup>(1)</sup> In 1630, a comedy, called "war and peace", was performed. The *dramatis personæ* consisted of all Olympus, Jupiter,

---

<sup>(1)</sup> *Theatergeschichte von Schütz.* Hamburg 1774.

Mars, Apollo, and other gods and goddesses who assemble to discuss the terrible thirty years' war raging in Germany. Irene, the so called goddess of peace, is sent to earth to examine matters and try to set them in order, in which she succeeds rather better on the stage than in reality. At the conclusion, all the divine personages form a group, and Irene exclaims: "Now, thanks to God and holy justice, that the cruelty of the furious Mars and the horrors of war are bound and broken!" (1)

In 1669, appeared the drama of Polente, or the unfortunate marriage, a tale of love and horrors in which devils, angels, witches figure by turns. But one of the most popular pieces of this period is a religious or semi-religious drama, entitled "Adam and Eve," in which the poet does not hesitate to present on the stage the person of the Godhead himself. In the first act, Jehovah appears and creates Adam; but in what manner is not explained in the text. Adam commences his existence with a duet! He sings:

Heaven and earth and sea and sky  
 Oh! what wonders meet my eye!  
 God's mighty host! what do I view?  
 Am I living, is it true?

To which Jehovah replies, —

Yes live, thou being formed in our own image:  
 Model of manly truth,  
 Old while in earliest youth.

(1) Schütz's Geschichte des Hamburgischen Theaters. p. 69.

And then at Adam's earnest supplication, —

I cannot live alone,  
My heart will turn to stone,

Eve is created; a still more difficult feat, on the stage, than the formation of Adam and which must have called for no common degree of skill on the part of the performers. In the second act, Lucifer appears in Pandæmonium, surrounded by his devils whom he summons forth from the gloomy depths of hell, to aid him in his vengeance on mankind; he sings:

Come forth and engage  
With fury and rage  
This enemy man;  
And be silent, if you can.

Which last exordium would seem to indicate that loquacity was not, then at least, confined to women. The third act brings us once more into the garden of paradise, and we behold Eve in her beauty and hear her while devouring the fatal apple for which we have all, more especially her own sex, to pay so dearly, sing the following verses:

Eat it will not harm thee, my treasure;  
'T will lighten thy face and fill thee with pleasure.  
Eat! it will give us, believe thy wife,  
The fruit of everlasting life.

Adam yields and, while eating, in his turn enquires who led Eve to this noble tree? When she replies "the serpent", a dark presentiment seizes him,

Alas, Alas! I dread, I fear  
That we shall have to pay it dear.

His forebodings are speedily verified; in the fourth and last act we see the first pair driven forth from Eden by an Angel with a flaming sword: the scene suddenly changes to a thorny barren field where they sink weeping on the ground, while, in the air, the Saviour appears in an “admirably contrived machine” and speaks hope and comfort to the repentant sinners. Such were the spectacles which charmed the most enlightened audiences in Germany, at the very moment that *Cinna*, *Andromache* and the *Tartuffe* were represented on the French stage; when England, though she could no longer boast a Shakespeare, had at least an *Otway* and a *Congreve*.

It is but just to say, however, that the strange performances we have endeavoured to describe, were not suffered to proceed without interruption. The ministers of the reformed creed of the 17<sup>th</sup> century could scarcely be expected to regard this mixture of the sacred and profane, with the same indulgence it had met with from the church in the 14<sup>th</sup> and which, indeed, had been in some measure withdrawn.

Loud were the invectives thundered against them by choir and pulpit. The actors were denounced as godless miscreants who, not content with plunging themselves in destruction, sought to drag down their fellow-men into everlasting perdition; and this opposition, though it could not suppress the obnoxious performances, certainly did much to diminish their success and thin the audience. Indeed for awhile, the drama gave place to the marionettes (<sup>1</sup>). But the love of

---

(<sup>1</sup>) Mr. Magnin, *Histoire des Marionnettes*.

scenic art increasing, with increasing wealth and luxury, proved too powerful for the clergy and, despite all their efforts to prevent it, an opera house was built at Hamburgh and, at once, became the darling amusement of the inhabitants.

To follow the history of the German theatre, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to our own day, would exceed our limits. Enough to say that Lohenstein, Opitz and some others, by introducing new elements, somewhat raised its standard. After their death it sunk for a time into total insignificance till Lessing, by creating a national drama, paved the way for those productions of which the nation is so justly proud.

---

## CHAPTER XVI.

FABLE. — REINECKE FUCHS. — THE FRENCH RENARD. — THE NARRENBESCHWÖRUNG. — THE CURATE OF CALEMOBURG. — THE SCHILDBURGHERS.

THERE is yet another description of poetry of which we have not yet spoken and which, nevertheless, played no unimportant part in the literature of the middle ages. Fable has ever been the earliest form in which nations have clothed the outpourings of their imagination, and the idea of endowing animals with thoughts and feelings akin to their own, was natural at an epoch when men, through their mode of life, found themselves in almost daily contact with the denizens of the forest and regarded them with an interest and affection of which none can now perhaps form a conception, save the shepherd who passes long months with no companionship save that of his flock and his faithful dog. The principal of all these fables, that which has survived the lapse of time and change of ideas, is the well known "Reinecke Fuchs". What form this tradition may have borne in the first instance it is difficult to say; according to some writers, it consisted of separate stories, arranged in a very concise form, which were gradually blended into

a more harmonious whole and these we have before us in the Reinecke and, in still greater detail in the voluminous roman, the French Renard. (1)

The Reinecke, indeed, is claimed alike by the French and Germans. The argument of those who maintain its Teutonic origin, rests principally on the names of the brute actors in the tale, "Isengrün" being, they maintain, evidently derived from "Eisen-grimm" cruel as iron; Bruin from "braun", brown, etc.; but this argument proves nothing. The personages are indeed of German race, that of the Franks the conquerors of Gaul; but at the epoch at which, so far as we can discover, the fable of Renard first arose, the commencement of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Franks had long since become Frenchmen. Besides, as had been already remarked by Mr. Hallam (2) and has been since established in a manner almost irrefutable by Monsr. Saint Marc Girardin, (3) there exists such an analogy between the events of history and those of the roman, as to leave little doubt that it owes its source to France, that the fable, in its pristine form at least, is really nothing more than the description of the contest between a knight of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and his liege lord, the Duke of Lorraine, in which, in order to insure a wider field for his satirical observations, the writer has clothed the *dramatis personae* in the guise of animals instead of men.

In 898, the King of Germany, Arnould, conferred the

(1) Le roman du Renard par l'ierre St. Cloud. 4 vols.

(2) Literature of the middle ages. Vols. 1st.

(3) Souvenirs de voyage et d'études. Vol. 2d. p. 289.

Archy of Lorraine on his natural son, Zwentibold, to whom he was tenderly attached. Zwentibold had a councillor and friend, called Regnier, or, as the chronicle terms him, Reginarius, Recochardus or Reinecke, one of the most important personages of Lorraine and notorious at once for his skill and cunning. For many years, he retained the favour of his master who reposed in him his entire confidence; but, at length, in consequence of some of his intrigues coming to light, a breach ensued and Regnier, not only lost the favour of Zwentibold, but was obliged to fly from Lorraine and take refuge in his castle of Durfos. Zwentibold, whose indignation against his former favourite was roused to the highest pitch, twice besieged him and twice was forced ignominiously to raise the siege. Here we, at once, trace the analogy between the "Renard" and real historical events. It must be observed, however, that the "Reinecke" differs in many important respects from the "Renard." The tone and style, indeed, are sufficiently German to admit of the supposition that, even if its origin be French, it was appropriated by the people of the north at so early a period as almost to entitle them to claim it as their own. The wit of the "Reinecke" bears the same analogy to that of the "Renard," as London porter to sparkling Champagne. It is denser, heavier, less brilliant. In the "Renard" the fox is not only cunning, base, reacherous and adroit, he is likewise a gay gallant deceiver, a successful adorer of the fair sex, and wins the favour of the leopardess whom the king is

wooing, for himself is worthy of "l'avocat" Patelin. So is the scene in which, learning that a Bull of excommunication has been thundered against him, he exclaims:

Que ferai-je?  
Manger ne pourrai plus de pain  
Si je n'ai appétit ni faim.  
Et mon pot bouillir ne pourra  
Tant que le feu ne sentira

These lines, as audacious as any thing we discover in the "Narrenschiff" or other satirical poems of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, sufficiently prove that, even in France and long before the apparition of Luther, the anathemas of the church, once so dreaded, had begun to lose their terrors.

The German Reinecke is neither so sceptical nor so amorous as his French prototype. He deceives the lion and plays the most abominable tricks on his fellow animals, but he is a faithful husband and a loving father. In this respect, the German poem presents as decided a superiority over the French roman, as the German nation itself presented over that of France in the middle ages and, still more in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. We are afraid, however, we can scarcely say as much at the present day.

The earliest appearance of this fable in the north seem to have been in 1136, in Flanders. It was written, in Latin, by a certain Nivardus and entitled Isengrimm. It contains several tales of wolves only. Some fifty years later, we find another under the name of Reinardus which presents us with ten additional stories in which the fox, though introduced, plays

only a subordinate part. About the same period, a similar work was composed in Germany by an individual called Heinrich von Gleichsäre, which seems to have been a great favourite with the people. But it did not obtain any thing like the popularity enjoyed by the French Renard, which, as the prior of St. Vimes, Gauthier le Comte, pathetically declares in a collection of pious tales dated 1236, was actually preferred by many persons to sacred legends; while the adventures of Renard were painted on those walls once hallowed by pictures of the Virgin and the saints. Nevertheless, towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it began to attract greater notice in Germany. In 1711, it was reprinted from the original manuscript of Gleichsäre which had long been regarded as lost and had been, only lately, discovered by chance in the little Hessian town of Melsungen, where a merciless land-steward had cut pieces out of the parchment to make bindings for his accounts. In 1834 it was reprinted, with an excellent glossary, by Hoffmann von Fallersleben, and since then has gone through a variety of versions, the last of which that of Goëthe, though immeasurably superior in grace and elegance, has lost something of the naïveté and racy humour of the original.

The subject of Reinecke Fuchs is so well known that we scarcely venture to trouble our readers with a résumé. Enough to say that the king of beasts, holding one day a solemn court, is surrounded by complainants, Isengrim, the wolf, Lampe, the hare, Hinze, the cat, all of whom bring the most violent accusations against their common enemy, Reinecke.

Each and all accuse him of unpardonable offences. The monarch, indignant, despatches Bruin, the bear, to summon the culprit to his presence. He willingly undertakes the commission; but, beguiled by the cunning Reinecke, contrives to get into an infinity of scrapes, and returns having failed in his errand and lost his ears, and Hinze, the cat, being dispatched on a similar mission, has scarcely a better fate. At length Reinecke, seeing that there is no help for it, presents himself before the august tribunal. He is condemned to be hanged and is actually at the top of the scaffold when, by a speech in which he hints at secret treasures, he obtains not only his life but permission to depart on a pilgrimage to Rome. As the treasures, however, do not make their appearance and his delinquencies, (for he soon resumes his old courses), once more meet the king's ears, he is again brought to judgment, and again contrives, by cunning appeals and specious arguments, to touch the auditory and move even the judge. At length Isengrim, unable longer to bear this mockery of justice, summons him to single combat, in which the rogue comes off triumphant by a method not to be mentioned to ears polite. His innocence thus proved, he is loaded with favours by the monarch who has already been won by his flattery, and is promoted to the posts of chancellor and minister of state.

This work possesses great vigour of colouring and displays no common knowledge of human nature, its follies, vices and absurdities; on the other hand, it is frequently both coarse and tedious. But much must be pardoned, in consideration of the period at which it was

written and the taste of those to whom it was addressed, while the lessons of wisdom which the author has here found the means of inculcating are equally valuable in every age. And yet, so far as is possible, his animals retain the instinct of their separate races. They speak, think and act as foxes, wolves and bears would do, if they were endowed with the reasoning faculty to understand their own feelings and speech to explain them. The tale is a vast comedy, the *dramatis personæ* of which are brutes instead of men.

Ere closing this brief survey of the so-called poets of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in Germany, we must bestow a few words upon two authors whose works, though little known beyond their native soil, were almost as popular in their day as Parson Amis, the Narrenschiff or Reinecke Fuchs itself. The first of these, a Franciscan friar, indignant at the attacks directed against the Romish church, wrote a satirical poem in imitation of the Narrenschiff in which the tables were turned and the fiercest invectives poured down on the reformers.<sup>(1)</sup> It was called the Narrenbeschwörung or Exorcism of Fools. Although coarse and virulent, it is, if we are not mistaken, far superior in keenness of wit and satire to the much vaunted work of Brandt. It was followed by another production of the same nature, the Schelmenzunft or Guild of Fools. But here the lash is no longer aimed exclusively

---

<sup>(1)</sup> Murner's works will be found in the Kloster vol. 10th; the Narrenbeschwörung was published 1506.

at the Lutherans. It falls indiscriminately on all whom the author deems deserving chastisement, and on none more severely than on those of his own order. Yet both these works are surpassed in energy and violence by the third and last "Die grossen Lutherischen Narren", which a modern critic has declared the most important satirical production on the Roman catholic side which appeared at the era of the reformation.<sup>(1)</sup> But while Murner called down obloquy and ridicule on the new faith, the reformers found a champion equal in zeal and perhaps superior in abilities in Johann Fischart whose gay and gladsome humour, keen irony and philosophic satire have been accepted as an excuse for his grossness and tediousness. His works, like those of Murner, may be found in the Kloster; but fortunately their inordinate length prevents their attracting many readers.<sup>(2)</sup>

Till Eulenspiegel, as it is called, was long celebrated in Germany as a compendium of popular wit and wisdom; originally in prose it was versified by Fischart in 1670. It contains the life and adventures of the said Till, probably an assumed name, and has had the honour, which we own we scarcely think it deserves, of being translated into almost every modern tongue.

The Curate of Calembourg, the hero of another satirical poem of the same period, was a real personage and one of the Councillors of Duke Otho the Merry. His adventures long formed the delight of Germany in

(1) Billmar's Geschichte deutscher Literatur. Vol. 1st.

(2) Klester. Vol. 10th.

the 16<sup>th</sup> century; but we doubt if they would be considered very amusing in the present age.

The ‘‘Buch von den Schildbürgern’’, or story of the Schildburghers, is more worthy of attention. The spirit of satire, one of the dominant elements of the German mind in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, found no inconsiderable aliment in the burghers and senators of those cities which had lately risen to eminence. In the pride of newly acquired wealth and importance, these personages often assumed airs of grandeur, wisdom and learning which made them fair subjects of jest and raillery. Where the little town of Schela might be, or why it was specially selected as a theme of ridicule we know not; but the work introduces us to the senators of the said town, who are discussing the propriety of erecting a new palace for their deliberations. Being apparently of delicate constitution they make no windows, lest perchance the cold should penetrate into the apartment. Of course they find themselves in profound darkness, on which each deputy, lighting a torch, fixes it to his cap, and they begin to argue with great warmth as to what light and darkness really may be, and if it is not possible to introduce the former and banish the latter at will. After an animated debate they appoint a committee to examine the subject who succeed in decomposing the rays of the sun so as to make use of them at pleasure, but find, to their great discomfiture, that these rays will give no light. They are plunged in despair when a traveller, happening to hear their lamentations, advises them to pull off the roof! This luminous idea is received with accla-

mation. The roof is torn off, and all goes on admirably till the rainy season, when it is discovered that the senators get wet to the skin. Three times does the assembly meet and deliberate. The result of the first day's discussion is that the roof must be replaced; of the second that if it be, they shall again find themselves in darkness; of the third that every deputy is to bring a candle with him to light up the gloom. But as this arrangement is at best very defective, a special committee is again named to debate upon the means of remedying the evil. They continue their sittings for four years, and the result of their labours printed in seventy quarto volumes forms the admiration of posterity. At length it being observed that the sun actually penetrates through a crevice left by accident in the wall, some brilliant genius proposes to widen this crevice indefinitely, and a law is voted for the purpose. Every year the question of the enlargement is brought before the assembly and the subject gives rise, we are assured, to some of the most brilliant specimens of Schilda eloquence.

After this, we need not be surprised to find the good burghers dragging a huge millstone from the top of a steep hill to the bottom, and then carrying it up again that it may roll down of its own accord. But even this is nothing in comparison with what is to follow. Fearing that the stone may be lost in the novel operation, it is proposed that a citizen shall attend its downward progress to see what becomes of it. An honest Schildburgher offering his services, puts his head into the hole and man and millstone roll together into the abyss. One might

suppose that such devotion would meet its reward in grateful panegyric and perhaps a pension to the widow. Not at all. A proclamation is issued declaring that a worthless fellow having run away with a millstone round his neck, he shall be outlawed of ever he venture to return, a cutting, but let us hope not always a just satire on human and national gratitude. (1)

---

(1) Von der Hagen's *Rarrenbuch*. p. 1—214. Some portion was published in the 18th century in *Rheinfrid von Braunschweig*.

---

## CHAPTER XVII.

LUTHERAN PERIOD. — LIFE, ADVENTURES AND POETRY OF  
ULRICH VON HUTTEN. — FRANZ VON SICKINGEN. — ULRICH  
VON WÜRTEMBERG.

FROM 1517 to 1624 may be termed the period of Luther; for that celebrated man was its predominating genius. With Luther's merits, as a reformer or an individual, we have nothing to do. It is in a literary point of view only that we regard him; for it is a singular fact, that his influence over the literature of his country was scarcely less important than that which he exercised over her theology. The remodelling of the German tongue may be said to have gone hand in hand with the reformation, and, it is to Luther more than to any other, that it owes its rapid progress. Between the language of Bona in 1340, and that of Luther in 1534, the difference is almost as great as between Chaucer and the writers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. "The language of Luther", observes Gervinus, "is of such wondrous purity, and its influence on his immediate contemporaries was so

great, that it may be regarded as the basis of our modern high German." (1) His translation of the scriptures was the first familiarly read by all classes, and none have rendered more admirably the beautiful simplicity and lofty solemnity of that holy volume, although the language, now and then, is somewhat rude and coarse, as might be expected from the age to which it belongs. Luther had none of the stern and puritanical spirit of Knox and Calvin. He loved both mirth and music; the latter, as he declares, next to theology, and permitted, though he did not encourage, dramatic amusements. His hymns are no less remarkable for the vigour of their style, than for their high devotional feeling.

The reformation, like all great events which stir men's spirits to the very depths, called forth a stream of productions of various and unequal merits. Carried away by their ardour, in what they believed the cause of civil and religious liberty, these writers frequently display more good will and enthusiasm than wit and judgment. Among those who most powerfully aided the cause with pen and sword, was a man too celebrated by his personal character, his writings and the influence he exercised on the events of his time, to be passed over in silence. Ulrich von Hutten, the eldest son of a noble and wealthy family, was in consequence of his delicate health, early destined for the cloister. After pursuing his studies with considerable success for some years, his aversion for the

---

(1) Gervinus. Vol. 3d. p. 48.

monastic life became insurmountable and, unable to obtain his father's permission to abandon the career for which he had been educated, he fled secretly, the very evening before he was to pronounce the indissoluble vows.

The consternation of the good friars, when the moment arrived and the fugitive was nowhere to be found, and the indignation of his father, can be better imagined than described. The latter refused to have any thing more to do with his disobedient son and utterly disclaimed him. Hutten afterwards declared that he regarded the extreme harshness of his family as the express decree of providence, and that the trials to which, during so many years, he was subjected, were perhaps needed to call forth the full measure of his compassion for the suffering and afflicted. But, although abandoned by his father, he was not entirely deserted; a friend and kinsman, the noble Eitelwolf von Stein, supplied him with the means of existence and, by his advice, he repaired to the university of Frankfort on the Oder, where he prosecuted his studies with great success and received the degree of Doctor.

His adventures, however, from this period till 1510, are little known. Some of his biographers assert that he travelled on foot to Italy; according to others, he remained in Germany, wandering from place to place, harp in hand, like the minstrels of old and supporting himself as best he could on the way. One thing only is certain, that, in 1509, he arrived at the university of Greifswald in Pomerania, where he was

at first kindly received by the Burgomaster Lotz and the professor his son. But this good understanding was of brief duration; of the exact cause of the quarrel his biographers do not inform us: be it what it may, Ulrich resolved rather to endure the extreme of misery, than to remain dependent on men by whom he felt or imagined himself wronged and insulted. He departed secretly; but the Lotzes discovering his flight, sent some gend'armes after him on the pretext of demanding the clothes they had given him, and in which consisted his only suit. Probably Hutten offered some resistance, otherwise it would be difficult to account for the violence to which his assailants resorted; for they not only stripped him to his shirt, but beat him so cruelly that the scars remained for many years. Bleeding and almost naked, he reached Rostock in November 1509, where he was fortunate enough to meet with a more amicable reception. (1)

To eke out his scanty means, now very nearly exhausted, Hutten gave lectures, recited poetry and wrote satires on his late inhospitable hosts, which called down general condemnation on their heads. Unfortunately, the dissipation in which he had at one time indulged had brought on a disease from which, for many years, he suffered most cruelly. Meanwhile his father, tormented by some qualms of conscience, sought and discovered the place of his retreat. Too proud himself to open any communica-

---

(1) Meiner's Beschreibungen berühmter Männer. Zürich 1797. „Leben von Hutten“. — Wagner's Leben von Ulrich von Hutten. Leipzig 1803.

tion, he commissioned his friend Carolus Rubianus, spiritual director of the monastery in which Hutten had been educated, to write to him with the promise of full forgiveness, on condition of returning forthwith to the cloister. Carolus complied; but, as may be supposed, his efforts were ineffectual.

Though tolerably well off at Rostock, Hutten's restless spirit urged him on to new adventures, and forth he set once more, travelling of course on foot, living on alms, sleeping by the road side or in the peasant's hut, but always cheerful, despite mental anxiety and bodily suffering. At length, he reached Wittenberg, where the fame of his learning, which had preceded him, insured him a favourable reception. During his brief stay at Oltho, whither he soon after repaired, the bishop Stanislaus of Tourgo was so delighted with his wit and classical lore, that he not only entertained him sumptuously for several days, but, on his departure, presented him with a horse and a purse of gold. So on he wandered through Bohemia and Moravia till he reached Vienna, where, partly for glory and partly perhaps to replenish his impoverished exchequer, he wrote sundry verses in Latin in praise of the Emperor Maximilian, which brought him something more tangible than fame. Having been informed, however, that if he would devote himself to the study of jurisprudence, there was still some chance of melting his father's stony heart, he betook himself to the university of Padua where he set to work with his usual energy; but his stay was not destined to be of long duration. The town was soon besieged and taken by the Imperialists, and

Hutten's unconcealed partiality for the French rendered him so obnoxious to the victors, that it was with difficulty he avoided being detained in captivity. He escaped, however, to Bologna, where he recommenced his studies. But his purse was now completely exhausted, his former means of obtaining funds by lectures etc. necessarily failed in a foreign land, in the language of which he was imperfectly versed, and, at length, he was compelled to enter the imperial service as a common soldier.

In this position, he continued for nearly two years; then, sick in heart and body, he demanded and obtained his discharge, and slowly and painfully wended his way back to Germany, with scarcely a coat to his back or a sou in his pocket, but with a soul still glowing with hope and daring. Fortune, at length, began to smile on him; the noble Eitelwolf, though now minister of the Margrave Albert of Brandenburg, had not forgotten the friend of his childhood. No sooner did he learn that Hutten was once more on German soil, than he hastened to relieve his immediate necessities and introduced him to his master, by whom he seems to have been treated with considerable kindness. At this period he wrote his panegyric of the Churfürst of Mainz, considered one of the finest of his poems. Still he remained comparatively unknown and unnoticed, when a circumstance occurred which not only called him forth from obscurity, but placed him in the foremost rank, as the defender of the rights and liberties of his countrymen.

Hutten had a cousin called Johann, somewhat younger than himself, one of the most amiable and accomplished

knights of the day. He had entered the service of Ulrich, Duke of Würtemberg, to whom he was devotedly attached and to whom he and his family had rendered important services, in the various civil feuds and contentions in which the duke's ungovernable and despotic temper had involved him with his subjects. When, in 1514, the discontent of the peasants, ground down and oppressed in every conceivable manner, had led to the revolt of the "Arme Conrad", and the duke's exchequer was nearly drained of its resources, Johann's father not only lent him a very considerable sum, Meiner says 10,000 gold ducats, without interest or security, but marched to his aid with a numerous body of his own retainers and of all whom, by his interest or influence, he could draw to his standard. Ulrich did not appear ungrateful for this devotion. He loaded Johann with favours, admitted him to his most intimate confidence and seemed to regard him with almost brotherly affection. Unfortunately, however, the young knight loved and wooed the daughter of the duke's chancellor, Von Thumb, little imagining that his master was already madly enamoured of the fair lady and that she was more than suspected of listening too favourably to his guilty vows.<sup>(1)</sup> The union approved of by the parents on both sides, was celebrated with great splendour, the duke himself honouring it by his presence and contemplating it apparently with unmixed satisfaction. This however was but a feint; his passion, far from diminishing, only increased in

---

(1) The duke was already married to Sabina of Bavaria.

intensity until, at length, even the young husband, whose chivalric confidence in the woman he adored and the master he loved and honoured had long rendered him blind to what was going on around him, began to suspect that there was something wrong. According to some authors, it was his bride who, either from a lingering desire to preserve her threatened honour, or from more questionable motives, took the initiative and complained of the duke's assiduities. According to others, his eyes were fully opened by some more observant friends. Scarcely yet believing what he heard and saw, Johann hastened to the duke and besought him, in the name of all that was dear and holy, to abandon a course equally fatal to the honour and happiness of both; but what was his surprise, when Ulrich, in reply, fell at his feet and with tears implored him to permit him to love his wife, declaring that his existence was bound up in her, and offering, as an indemnification, to aid and abet any suit Hutten might think fit to make to his own duchess Sabina. This mode of treating the affair, however, did not suit the noble youth. With mingled grief and indignation he retired, resolved as quickly as possible to quit a prince who could thus requite his faithful services. But the representations of the chancellor who, with unheard of baseness, pandered to his child's dishonour, the entreaties of his faithless wife, induced by the prayers and promises of her royal lover, and his own lingering affection for the friend of his youth delayed his departure till, doubt being no longer possible, he demanded leave of absence, under pretext of family affairs. Ulrich dared

not openly refuse; but, stung to madness, he resolved to resort to a last and desperate expedient to make the object of his sinful love his own for ever. Affecting remorse for the past, he invited Hutten to ride with him in the neighbouring woods, observing, that as the distance was short and the roads sure, he need not take the trouble of donning his armour. The unsuspecting youth complied. Without helmet or sword, with nothing but the short dagger worn by knights on hunting excursions, he rode forth beside his treacherous master who had himself concealed a suit of steel beneath his ordinary attire. When a little way out of the town, the duke contrived, on some pretext or other, to get rid of the rest of his followers and continued conversing in the most amicable manner with Hutten till, having reached the deepest recesses of the forest, he suddenly fell on him, struck him blow upon blow and laid him prostrate and lifeless at his feet. Then raising the body, he tied it by a girdle to a tree, that it might be believed he had committed the deed, not from any sentiment of private vengeance, but in his capacity of member of the Vehmgericht, that mysterious council so respected and dreaded throughout Germany, and bound to punish the guilty.

The grief, horror and indignation of the unhappy father, on learning the fate of his son, may be conceived. It was shared by all Germany; ballads were every where sung lamenting the fate of the young count and pouring down maledictions on his murderer. Many of the duke's followers left him in horror and disgust. In vain did he seek to excuse the deed

by alleging that the murdered man had been guilty of treason and had sought to seduce his wife Sabina. The evidence was too strong against him. One convincing proof of his guilt and Johann's innocence consisted in the fact, that the object of his criminal passion fled to his arms and thenceforth remained his constant companion, while the duchess left his court for ever to return to her father's dominions. Not even the warmest adherents of despotism gave him credence. On his subsequent journey to Vienna, to soften the indignation of the emperor, the general feeling sufficiently manifested itself in the coldness and silence with which he was every where received. One Austrian knight, whose name we regret not being able to record, absolutely refused to receive him in his castle, declaring he would not suffer his abode to be sullied by the presence of a man who first dis-honoured his friend and then murdered him. (1)

None were more deeply pained, more fearfully incensed than Hutten. In his boyhood, he had received much kindness from his uncle, and the murdered man had been the companion of his earliest sports and pleasures. "Oh!", he exclaims in a letter to his friend Margard von Garstein, "what fearful tidings! that hopeful young man murdered by the duke! what can prevent his aged father from destroying his own life in his anguish and despair? Would to God that I were there to console, to soothe him! May I only find him living when I arrive. You know how kind

---

(1) Reiner's „Leben von Hutten“ and Schubart's „Hutten's Jugend-leben“. Leipzig 1791.

he always was to me, with what liberality he aided my studies; and even had that not been the case, who would not be moved by such a misfortune; by the innocence, the integrity, the blighted hopes of the unhappy youth! Is there a vengeance adequate to such a crime?"

Ulrich did not content himself with vain regrets; though, at the time sick and suffering, he poured forth the most eloquent appeals to the German princes and people, calling for justice on the perpetrator of so ruthless a deed.

Perhaps the warm interest which he evinced in the fate of his family, or the laurels with which his vindication of his late relative, especially the "Deploratio in miserabilem Joannem de Hutten" had crowned him, (1) touched the heart or moved the pride of his stern old father, and a reconciliation ensued which permitted Hutten, once more, to behold the home of his ancestors. The death of his friend Eitelwolf saddened this otherwise happy moment. Eitelwolf was no common man. To martial prowess and statesmanlike ability, he united a love of letters not a little rare at that period, and, indeed, held derogatory to nobleman or knight. "My friend", he said in reply to an old Suabian, who told him on one occasion he was too young to decide a question of importance "You know what has taken place the last forty or fifty years, and I what has occurred the last three thousand."

The loss of this dear and powerful friend, the dissimilarity of taste and opinion between himself and

---

(1) See Panzers Ulrich von Hutten in literarischer Sicht. Künzberg 1795.

his father, rendered Hutten's residence in Germany little agreeable; so off he set once more for Rome, to recommence his constantly interrupted studies on jurisprudence. Scarcely, however, had he arrived, when he found himself engaged in a quarrel with some French noblemen who had spoken in disparaging terms of Germany and the Germans. He killed one, and put the rest to flight though not without receiving a severe wound. He celebrated his victory in five little poems, (1) but was obliged to quit Rome to avoid the threatened vengeance of his adversaries; so he directed his steps to Bologna. Here, however, he so offended the Podesta by defending the cause of the German students against the Italian, in a long and eloquent harangue, that he was soon compelled to depart. Hence he betook himself to Venice, where he was cordially welcomed by all the learned men of that city; but the love of home and fatherland still lingered in the depths of his soul, and in 1517 we see him at Augsburg. Being well recommended to Maximilian for his learning, eloquence and above all his gallant defence of his countrymen's rights in Italy, the emperor, in a solemn public assembly, conferred on him the dignity of imperial poet, knighted him and, with his own hands, placed on his brow a laurel wreath won by the fair Constantia, daughter of the learned Conrad Peutinger, and one of the most beautiful women of her

---

(1) See: *Vita Melanchthonii* by Camerarius who heard this story from Hutten's own lips.

day.<sup>(2)</sup> Hutten now seemed on a fair road to fortune. Had he been so inclined, he might probably have led an easy and prosperous life and died, full of years and honours, in his ancestral castle which, not long after, devolved upon him by the death of his father. But his was not a spirit to behold unmoved the great struggle then pending between Luther and Catholicism. He does not seem, at this period indeed, to have entertained any serious doubts as to the spiritual supremacy of Rome. It was its temporal domination which he denounced as full of evil to the cause both of religion and freedom. In Italy, where he had so long sojourned, he had beheld, under their worst aspect, the corruption, luxury and venality which then tainted the Romish church and paved the way for the Reformation. It was against these, far more than against its peculiar doctrines, that Hutten's denunciations were hurled, and, if he afterwards became a zealous proselyte to Lutheranism, it was only because he discovered, or believed he discovered, that Catholicism and liberty were incompatible. Inspired by these sentiments, he employed all his powers of wit and irony against the sovereign Pontiff. A bull of excommunication was thundered against him. From the immediate effects of this, however, he was rescued by the generous hospitality of the Churfürst of Mainz who, though firmly attached to the church, of which he was a dignitary, perceived and lamented its abuses. But the tranquillity of this little Episcopal court, soon wearied Hutten's restless

---

(1) See „Reiner's Leben”, page 113.

spirit and forth he went once more, no longer to wander from court to court or city to city, but to gird on the sword and join his friend, the noble Franz von Sickingen, and the Suabian confederacy who had taken up arms against the Duke of Würtemberg.

According to some of his biographers, Hutten had previously made over his whole paternal estate to his second brother, so as to preserve it to his family, should he fail in his enterprise.<sup>(1)</sup> Success however appeared almost certain. Ulrich of Würtemberg had contrived by a singular mixture of tyranny, profligacy and extravagance, not only to alienate all classes of his subjects, to exasperate to fury his injured though not very gentle spouse, but, in addition, to incense the emperor by refusing to submit to the decision he had pronounced in the affair between himself and the Huttens. By the mediation of the Duke of Bavaria, however, matters had been amicably arranged and the duke was on his way back to his dominions, whence he had been compelled to fly, when his own headstrong violence once more plunged him into ruin. While halting at the castle of Hettenberg, a shot was fired into his apartment by some malicious individual. He revenged the outrage by ordering the castle to be levelled to the ground and the surrounding village to be destroyed. One universal cry of indignation rose throughout the land, and the emperor placed the duke under ban, declaring he would pardon him only when he should sue for forgiveness on his knees and promise amendment. To these humiliating

---

(1) *Hutten's Jugendleben.* p. 139.

conditions the duke's pride refused to bow. The Suabian confederacy entered Würtemberg which submitted with scarcely a struggle, and, despite the entreaties of the duchess Sabina that her son might not be robbed of his inheritance, the duchy was conferred by Charles on his brother Ferdinand. The young prince was conducted to the Imperial court, where he was detained in a sort of honourable captivity, though treated with every kindness and consideration, while the duke fled to Zürich to seek for aid and succour among his Swiss allies who, albeit not very cordially, granted him an asylum.<sup>(1)</sup>

A few words as to the ultimate fate of this ill advised prince may not be uninteresting. In 1533, Ulrich who had contrived to collect a considerable army, partly from those adherents who yet remained faithful to his fallen fortunes, partly from the Swiss who were induced by his brilliant promises to aid his cause, attempted to become once more master of his hereditary dominions. Ferdinand and the League had made themselves obnoxious alike to the nobles and the people, and all classes were ready to forgive and forget their former Ruler's errors and hail his return. He obtained a complete victory over the Imperialists and, in a short time, reconquered the whole duchy with the exception of Hohenasberg. The emperor, indeed, was about to send a more formidable army against him, which would probably have changed the face of affairs, when, by the intervention of the

---

(1) See *Geschichte des Herzog Ulrich* by Eisenheim. Tübingen 1754. p. 73. Menzel's *Geschichte der Deutschen*. Vol. 2. p. 30.

Duke of Saxony, matters were brought to an amicable termination. Ulrich was reinstated in his dominions; but his follies and headstrong temper rendered the end of his reign almost as troubled as the beginning. He quarrelled alternately with son and subjects, lost the favour of the emperor by siding with the reformers, was compelled once more to fly his realm and obtained pardon only by the most humiliating submission.<sup>(1)</sup>

Meanwhile Hutten entered Stuttgart in triumph with the victorious confederates. His first care was to visit the grave of his hapless cousin. The body was found in a state of perfect preservation. The features were unchanged. "As we touched the corpse", says Hutten, "the blood flowed forth afresh, a token of his innocence and of the crime of which he had been victim."

Hutten remained some time with the confederacy, the sword in one hand, the pen in the other; wielding both with equal dexterity and skill. At times, however, the desire for a more tranquil life would rush on him with such force as to overcome every other feeling. "Let me have a wife", he writes, "a gentle, fair, shy and affectionate being; you know how much I would love her and, as for rank, She is noble enough whom Ulrich von Hutten chooses for his bride."

The wish was not destined to be realized; his continued attacks on the court of Rome, his celebrated "Vadiscus aut Trias Romana", called forth

---

(1) Ulrich von Württemberg von Hans Scherr. 1839.

a second excommunication; his works were interdicted and his friend and patron, the Archbishop, severely censured for the protection he had continued to afford him. Under these desperate circumstances, Hutten accepted the asylum offered him by Franz von Sickingen in his almost impregnable castle of Ebernburg. Here he established a printing press, thus placing the efforts of his enemies to suppress his works at defiance. At the same time, he turned for aid to a quarter where no spirit less sanguine than his own could for an instant have hoped to find it, to Charles V., now emperor of Germany who, at that period, manifested little partiality for Rome and who, therefore, he imagined might be induced to second his projects for the reform of church and state. These projects may be summed up in a few words. The reestablishment of the unity of Germany under the sanction of the reformed religion, the complete abolition of serfdom, the diminution of the power of the princes and the proclamation of liberty and fraternity in the name of the emperor and the Gospel. But such projects were little suited to the clear, practical and despotic views of Charles. He did not even deign to notice Hutten's appeal and, incensed by his daring epistles and violent diatribes, placed him under the ban of the empire. But nothing could quell that bold and fiery spirit. "I am accused and am to be punished", he writes, "because I would defend the welfare of my native land. They would throw me into fetters, not that I have offended any one, but because I would fain deliver my people from the wrongs they have so long endured. Grant

me, at least, what the very humblest can claim, the right of defending myself. I have always been an enemy to disturbances," he concludes rather naively, "my only aim is to prevent my own and my country's foes from oppressing us as they have hitherto done."

All Hutten's hopes were now centred in his friend Franz, whom he proposed elevating to no less important a dignity than that of Head of the empire! Wild as was this project, it did not seem utterly desperate. Germany was distracted with civil and religious feuds; the nobility of Suabia, the most powerful and the wealthiest in the realm, saw in the reformation the means of elevating their own position and diminishing the authority of the innumerable princes, dukes and bishops among whom Germany was then divided. The most important and most renowned of these revolutionary nobles was Franz von Sickingen. This knight has been justly termed the last flower of chivalry and was, indeed, wealthy and influential to such a degree, that Francis the first, when aspiring to the imperial crown, addressed him a separate letter, entreating his aid and interest; while his court, little inferior in numbers and splendour to that of a sovereign prince, was the chosen resort of all the aspiring, unquiet and cultivated spirits of the age. The following sonnet, found among Hutten's papers, was probably written at this period.

Franz, noblest of the German race art thou!  
Last of our country's warriors! Let me see  
The diadem upon that princely brow;  
For our last hope is centred all in thee.

Life has but little left to offer me;  
 I care not when or how I meet my doom,  
 So I behold my country great and free!  
 Death, then, will have no terrors and no gloom,  
 And German swords will flash triumphant o'er my tomb<sup>(1)</sup>.

Urged on by his own ardent spirit and still more by that of his friend, Franz von Sickingen summoned the knights and nobles of his party to meet him at Landau in 1522, when in forcible terms he set forth the wrongs they endured from emperor, pope and princes, and urged them to rise in arms to secure what he termed their just rights and liberties.

But the insurgents had miscalculated their resources. The nobles rose indeed at Cleves and Limber; but so badly were their movements concerted that they were quickly and easily repressed.<sup>(2)</sup>

In addition, the solicitude the friends, especially Hutten, evinced for the lower orders, estranged the middle-class which they so earnestly sought to conciliate; for the burghers feared the peasantry even more than they dreaded the nobility. The papers of Hutten and Sickingen having been destroyed when Ebernburg was burnt, it is impossible to tell how far the negotiations with the free towns and the peasants had been carried on. All we know is that Strasburg had promised its co-operation and that, by September 1522, Sickingen found himself at the head of 5000 infantry, 2000 cavalry and a tolerable train of artillery.

The scope of one work will not allow of our entering into the details of the campaign that ensued. It was but brief:

---

(1) *Hutten's Opera, von Ernst Münnich herausgegeben.*

(2) See Menzel. Vol. 2d. p. 39.

Carried away by his martial ardour, Sickingen invested the town of Treves, without waiting for the assistance promised by his confederates. Compelled to raise the siege and throw himself into Landshut, one of his fortified castles, he was besieged in his turn and, while directing the defence, a bomb from the enemy's camp broke the scaffold on which he was standing, and in falling he received a mortal wound. Carried to his bed, he lingered long enough to behold his garrison disengaged surrender to the enemy, and to witness the triumphal entry of the victors. To their reproaches or remonstrances he only replied, "he had to answer to a mightier Lord" and expired in May 1502.<sup>(1)</sup>

Ulrich was not at Ebernburg at the period of this disaster. He had been sent, on some negotiation of importance, to Basle, whence, however, he was now expelled by the authorities, fearful of offending the Imperial government. He sought refuge with Erasmus; but, with his usual prudent egotism, the learned Doctor absolutely refused admission to the fugitive for whom he had formerly evinced so much esteem and admiration. Thanks to the charity of Zwingli, Hutten found a refuge at Pfarrsdorf in the little Island of Ufernow on the lake of Zürich, where, worn with grief and fatigue, he ended his troubled existence, at the early age of thirty five.

We append a few translations from some of Hutten's works. Most were originally written in Latin,

---

(1) See Kriege und Schreiben des edlen Franz von Sickingen.  
Mannheim 1787.

though several were translated into German during his lifetime, to ensure a more extensive circulation. Among the most celebrated of these is the dialogue entitled *Warner*, purporting to be a conversation between himself and Franz von Sickingen.

Hutten's poems bear the impress of his mind and character; they have little artistic finish, no imagery, no play of fancy; but they are nervous, terse and vigorous. Gifted with powers of no common order, there is little doubt that, had he devoted himself to poetry, he might have attained a high place in the world of letters. Even as it is, his productious are highly estimated in his native land.

The "Warner" concludes with the well known poem "Ich hab's gewagt mit Sinne", at the end of which is a portrait of the knight himself, his brow bound with laurels and, in his right hand, a naked sword.

#### ICH HAB'S GEWAGT &c.

I've ventured, knowing what I risk'd,  
And never shall repent;  
And though I may not win by't,  
At least 'twas nobly meant.

No private aim  
For power or fame,  
But for my native strand!  
Say what they will,  
I'm fearless still,  
For God and fatherland!

Then let them rage at pleasure,  
And feign and lie beside;  
They'd love me beyond measure,  
If I the truth belied!

I've scorned pretence;  
They've driven me hence,  
And sought my life to blight;  
    I can no more,  
But what's in store,  
May yet set all things right!

I'll ne'er implore their mercy;  
I'm free from guilt or stain,  
And, if I suffer'd justly,  
I would not now complain!

Against all laws,  
My righteous cause  
They would not even hear;  
'Twas heaven's decree!  
    So let it be!  
He will make all things clear.

I have for consolation  
A conscience void of ill;  
Of this they cannot rob me,  
E'en hate me as they will.

None e'er can say  
    I turn'd away,  
When peril was at hand;  
Then stand or fall!  
    I scorn them all,  
For God and fatherland!

We pass by, without any extract, one of Hutten's most celebrated productions, a violent diatribe against the abuses and corruptions of the Romish church. Although probably but too true at the time it was written, we must remember that a great and lasting im-

provement took place in the following century, (1) and while we have before our eyes the spectacle of thousands of Catholics, men and women, whose whole existence is one perpetual sacrifice to the cause of humanity; when we see them in every part of the world in the midst of perils of all description, on the field of battle, by the bed of the dying, amid pestilence, famine or the ranks of the assassins, forgetting their own danger to save the helpless and wretched, it would be indeed unjust to dwell upon sins, inherent perhaps to humanity and, at all events, so nobly redeemed.

No traces of the ancestral castle of Hutten now remain. It was probably destroyed in the thirty years' war. But the stately relics of Ebernburg, perched on a precipitous rock like an eagle's nest, still tower majestically above the valley of the Nahe: though, alas! like many other ruins in Germany, they are now degraded into a *Restaurant*, whither the good inhabitants of the neighbouring town of Creuznach resort to dance and drink and be merry, none perhaps amid the mirthful throng troubling himself with the recollection that here, one of the proudest and most daring spirits of the age closed his brilliant career in ruin and desolation.

---

(1) Rank's hist. of the popes. p. 197 and Lord Macaulay's eloquent essay upon that work. p. 120.

---

## CHAPTER XVIII.

DECLINE OF POETRY. — ITS CAUSES. — THE PEASANT WAR.  
— LUTHER. — HIS MANIFESTO. — THE ANABAPTISTS. —  
HANS SACHS; HIS LIFE, ADVENTURES, POEMS, FABLES.

THE period that succeeded the events just narrated, was one of the most disastrous in German annals. Yet, it was pregnant with incalculable results. The reformation had won a mighty triumph; but it had brought with it consequences which its authors themselves had little foreseen. The doctrines of Luther had spread with lightning rapidity through the land. The peasant too had caught the sacred words of Evangelical freedom; he too had heard that all are equal in the sight of God, and the lesson, interpreted in its most literal sense, struck home. The condition of the peasantry in Germany, indeed, was most deplorable. There, serfdom, elsewhere rapidly disappearing, till lingered in all its force, and, in many parts, the labourer was literally regarded as one of the goods and chattels of his lord, nay, actually sold as such, is proved by the following document preserved in a chronicle of the year 1333. ‘I, Conrad Truchses

von Vrock, publicly declare to all whom it may concern, that I have disposed of two women, Agnes and her sister Markhill, with the children that may spring therefrom, for 1 florin 45 Groschen (about 3 shill., to the abbey of Münster".<sup>(1)</sup> Nor have we reason to believe this an isolated fact.

An old author, in his Cosmography of 1545, thus expresses himself: "The fourth class is composed of men who reside in the fields and villages, who till the soil and prepare the fruit. These lead a very miserable life; their houses are wretched huts of sand or wood, built on the bare ground, covered with straw. Their food is bad black bread, and peas and beans raw or boiled; their only drink water or goat's whey; their dress a smock frock, a pair of shoes and a straw hat. These poor people have never any rest: early and late they are forced to toil".

The first born of the peasant's cattle and the first fruits of his field were the property of his lord and a right, still more oppressive, the "droit du seigneur", was rigidly enforced as late as the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>(2)</sup> In some parts of Germany, indeed, particularly on the strip of land between the Eider and the Elbe, the peasants had risen in arms as early as 1144. After many desperate conflicts, they had succeeded in throwing off the fetters of serfdom; but, elsewhere, their condition remained unimproved. The rebellion of the "Armer Conrad" provoked by the cruelty and oppression of Ulrich

(1) Deutsche Cultur und Sitte. p. 242.

(2) Geschichte der Deutschen von Menzel. Vol. 2d. p.

von Würtemberg in 1480, had been repressed and punished with merciless severity; but, with each succeeding generation, the yoke of servitude became more intolerable, till, in 1570, the long smouldering embers of discontent burst forth into a flame. It was on Luther that the peasants rested their hopes, though his well known opinions promised them little sympathy. "The poor man", he had often declared, "should be borne down with burdens, to prevent his growing unruly, and he had gravely assured the peasant that his body belonged to his lord who had bought it, or had, otherwise, become possessed of it, so that it was no longer his own, but his master's, like a cow or any other of his goods and chattels".<sup>(1)</sup>

Luther's position, it must be allowed, was difficult and embarrassing. He dreaded, not without cause, lest his doctrine should be accused of a revolutionary or, as we should now call it, a socialist tendency. The idea of anarchy or civil war alarmed and disgusted him. While breaking down the supremacy of the church, he had not perceived that, whether for good or for evil, he was sapping the very root of all constituted authority. He had demanded liberty of conscience, but he shrank from the idea of that legal and social liberty which it brought in its train. Yet, so moderate were the demands of the peasants, that even Luther could not blame them. In substance, they were the same as those presented in 1789, by the Tiers-état of France to the National Assembly.

---

(1) Luther. A. A. G.

They asked the reform of justice, the abolition of serfdom. They required that some restriction should be imposed on the privilege, claimed by the nobles, of hunting over their fields, by which the produce of a whole season was often destroyed in a single hour, and thus concluded: "If any of the above named articles be not according to the law of God, we will abstain from demanding them so soon as this shall be proved, and if any, even when granted, should be found unjust, they shall be held as a dead letter from that very hour".<sup>(1)</sup> Could any language be more reasonable?

Luther would willingly have maintained a strict neutrality, but finding that impossible, his sense of justice triumphed over fear and prejudice. He addressed the contending parties in a tone of lofty exhortation, full of sound sense and right feeling. While urging on the peasants the duty of Christian resignation and submission, he sternly rebuked their masters for their pride, avarice and cruelty; declaring that they called down the vengeance of heaven and that some of the demands were so equitable, that the mere circumstance of their requiring to be made dishonoured the nobles before God and man. But with the exception of this energetic protest, Luther did little or nothing to stem the torrent of oppression; his words were drowned in the tumult of contending passions. The peasants, finding their demands rejected with scorn and contumely, rushed to arms and, impelled by the recollection of ages of wrong and

(1) Zimmerman's Bauernkrieg. p. 91.

insult, committed atrocities which soon brought on them a just and fearful retribution. — But when the rebellion was quenched in blood, when the wretched and misguided victims were dispersed and broken, who would not have expected to see Luther step forward as mediator between the conquerors and the conquered? Who is not struck with regret and amazement to hear from his lips, not lessons of mercy and forgiveness, but exhortations to vengeance and severity? — "Destroy, hunt down the robbers, the murderers", he wrote to the princes, "no mercy! no toleration is due to the peasants; on them should fall the wrath of God and man! They are under the ban of God and the emperor' and may be treated as mad dogs. May 13<sup>th</sup> 1525" (1). Nor does he evince much more pity in recounting the terrible massacres committed by the nobles, or the cruel tortures to which the miserable insurgents were subjected.

Our limits will not admit of our entering into the details of the peasants' war. Its conclusion is generally known. Scarcely was peace restored, when the Anabaptists arose and spread terror and destruction around. For John Mathison, or his successor John of Leyden, with their horrible mixture of cruelty, profligacy and extravagance, their courts, their pageants and their harems, it is impossible to feel the slightest sympathy; yet humanity shudders at the awful doom inflicted on them when they had fallen into the hands of their victors. (2)

---

(1) See life of Luther by Marheinecke, by Michelet, by Audin &c.

(2) Menzel's Geschichte der Deutschen. Vol. 2d.

The fearful nature of these events, the cruelties perpetrated on both sides, the devastation and calamities of the thirty years' war, all contributed to banish at least to a considerable degree the pursuit of literature and poetry, which fled affrighted from these scenes of violence and misery. Gervinus, indeed, denies that a period of warfare is necessarily fatal to the progress of the fine arts, and it must be confessed that both Italy and Greece furnish an argument in favour of his theory, that painting, poetry and sculpture may all be carried to the highest perfection, while the states in which they flourish are engaged in deadly conflict with each other or agitated by internal strife. Yet, if we examine the question closely in all its bearings, we shall find that it was generally during the intervals of these conflicts, not during the conflicts themselves, that these great works of human genius, which still kindle our admiration, were executed. But in Germany, during this disastrous period, there was no such pause. Besides, there was inspiration in the very air of those favoured lands which seemed to animate, all who inhaled it and which is wanting in colder climes. The natives of the south, ardent, impassioned and versatile are capable of the most rapid mental transitions, while the genius of the north, more slow in its progress, demands time, peace and tranquillity for its development. The invention of printing indeed was gradually effecting a mighty revolution. A new intellectual world was opened to the student. The Greek and Latin classics, hitherto sealed books to all save the wealthy or the erudite, were now free to general perusal, a:

prices still high indeed in comparison with those of the present day, but insignificant contrasted with the sums necessarily demanded previous to that wonderful invention which was to change the face of society.

But in this general revival of poetry and literature, Germany occupied the last place in the rank of nations. While Tasso and Ariosto were pouring forth their lays to the ears of kings and princes, celebrating the deliverance of the holy sepulchre or the feats of the paladins of Charlemagne, while Portugal was delighted with the strains of a Camoens, while England gloried in her Shakespeare, and France boasted her Ronsard and her Marot, Germany had no poets more eminent to produce than Hans Folz, Hans Sachs, Fischart and a few others of even less note. Far be it from us to speak with contempt of the excellent Hans Sachs, whom Goëthe, that highest of all authorities, has declared a writer of no ordinary merit, and whose productions have certainly a vein of shrewd sense, racy humour and genuine naiveté which redeems, at least to a considerable degree, their general rudeness and monotony. There is always a good moral at the bottom of every tale, and the excellent shoemaker wrote with such wonderful facility, that by the time he had arrived at the age of sixty, he had produced no less than sixty thousand verses and five hundred comedies; so that, next to Lope de Vega, he is the most prolific poet the world has ever known. Nor were his efforts confined to any particular description of verse; to his accommodating muse all was alike; nothing was too high or too low

for him, nor did the slightest diffidence of his own capacity ever interfere with the execution of his literary projects. Tragedies, comedies, odes, allegories, hymns, nothing came amiss. Many of these are below criticism; but, in his songs and fables, there is much good sense, drollery and satire and, above all, that hearty popular tone which so many modern authors have endeavoured vainly to attain. The first edition of his works appeared in 1558 at Nuremberg, and was much sought after; but in the succeeding age, which was that of thorough and unredeemed mediocrity, he was regarded with the deepest contempt, nor was it till the sovereign voice of Goëthe deigned to make honourable mention of him, that he was restored to public favour. Of late years, more than one new edition of his works has appeared, together with several biographical sketches, a sufficient proof of the estimation in which he is still held by his countrymen. (¹)

Of Hans' life few particulars have reached us. It seems, indeed, to have been unusually barren of incident and to have glided away in that calm, uneventful tranquillity which affords little scope for the biographer. He was born at Nuremberg in 1494. His parents who, though in the humbler ranks of life, appear to have been tolerably well to do in the world, sent him early to one of the best schools the town then afforded. Here, together with the ordinary branches of education, he learnt Greek, Latin and French. His knowledge of the learned

---

(¹) *Hans Sachs und seine Wanderungen* by Furchtau 1849.

tongues, was probably very superficial; yet if, as we are assured, he could repeat in his old age many of the finest passages from the Iliad by heart, he must have acquired no contemptible knowledge of the great masters of antiquity. At sixteen, he left the school for the workshop, and the classics for the awl and the hammer; in short, he was apprenticed to a shoemaker. The transition must have been rather a strange one; but Hans, with the good sense which characterized him, submitted without a murmur, albeit he had at one period dreamt of a loftier career. The following year, he commenced his “Wanderschaft” or travels, a singular custom, still prevalent in Germany, but producing none of the disastrous consequences with which it appears, at first sight, almost inevitably fraught. Of these travels we know but little. He passed some time at Munich and Vienna, gaining an honest and hard-won livelihood by the exercise of his craft. In one of these towns he met a fair young girl, a citizen’s daughter, who made a deep impression on his heart. But the damsel or her parents repulsed his suit and, after five years, he returned to his native city, where he settled down for the rest of his life as a shoemaker, and, shortly after, wedded Kunigunda Creuzerinn who brought him, in addition to a fair face and a kind heart, a very tolerable dowry.

All things went well with honest Hans. His trade prospered, his home was cheerful and he soon found that, without neglecting his business, he had plenty of leisure to devote to that art he had loved from boyhood; in short, that he could make shoes and

verses at the same time. If any of our readers are of opinion that he would have done better to confine himself to the former occupation, we would remind them of the degradation into which German poetry had sank, and that it was to the Meistersängers, among whom Hans may be classed, that it owed its preservation from total destruction. Ere long, Hans' poetical talents were so fully recognized that he was named director of the two hundred and fifty poetical societies at that time flourishing in Nuremberg.

In the midst of his tranquil existence came the reformation. Nuremberg was among the first cities in Germany to receive the new doctrine, and Hans Sachs soon became one of its most strenuous disciples and defenders. Those powers of sarcasm which had, hitherto, been spent on the petty follies of the Nuremberg citizens, or the violence of the neighbouring barons, now found a wider and more congenial theme on which they could expatiate at will without any danger of wearying his readers. But these polemical discussions or invectives did not interfere with the good shoemaker's other avocations, whether prosaic or poetical. We subjoin a translation of some of his compositions, leaving it to our readers to decide on their merits.

#### HYMN.

Oh! why art thou so sad, my breast,  
So full of sorrow and unrest?  
Trust unto God who all created;  
Thy wants and wishes will be sated.

He'll ne'er forsake thee in thine anguish;  
 In grief he will not let thee languish.  
 My father and my lord! indeed,  
 Thou aidest me in every need.

The rich upon his wealth relies.  
 I trust in God! he hears my sighs.  
 Though poor, despised, my lot tho' scant,  
 He who trusts thee shall never want.

Who good Elijah fed and tended,  
 All the long months no rain descended?  
 A widow from a distant land?  
 No; God who fed him by her hand.

God did not leave the three alone,  
 When in the fiery furnace thrown.  
 He saved them from the burning flame,  
 So that they lived to bless his name.

Art thou less mighty now than then?  
 Can'st thou not save, oh lord! again?  
 Defend me with thy holy love;  
 'Tis all I seek below, above.

Honour and praise be ever thine,  
 For all thy benefits divine!  
 Let me not be rejected quite,  
 My God! nor banished from thy sight.

In his praises of the environs of Nuremberg, our good Hans' muse assumes a more graceful strain. They thus commence:

Some while ago, I chanced to rove  
 One morning in a verdant grove,  
 To taste the charms of balmy May.  
 The sun shone forth with brightest ray:

I plunged into the deepest glade,  
 And saw, beneath the tall trees' shade,  
 Full many a herd of noble deer;  
 Stags, does and fawns were grazing near.

So on I strolled, in joyous mood,  
 'Mid the sweet windings of the wood;  
 I came unto a silver spring,  
 That o'er the moss-grown rock did fling  
 Its waters in the bed below, &c. (1)

Most of Hans' fables are taken from the ancients, with which, as we before said, he was tolerably well acquainted, and, as they have nothing novel or original and have been treated by succeeding writers of various nations, particularly by Lafontaine, we will not offer any extracts from them. Time passed on, but neither age nor domestic afflictions could darken Hans' sunny nature. His wife died, after bearing him seven children. He had loved her truly; their domestic happiness for one and forty years was a proof of his fidelity and affection; but he needed some one to cheer and solace him, and within a twelvemonth after her demise, he entered a second time into the bands of matrimony. Sorrows, still heavier perhaps, awaited his latter days. One after the other his children sank into the grave. He had been a fond and tender father, and mourned their loss with anguish deep and sincere; but his naturally buoyant spirits and firm faith in the mercy and wisdom of an Omnipotent Creator, sustained him, and

---

(1) Hans Sachs' Werke. Herausgegeben von Ernst Mündt.

he lived on peacefully and cheerfully till his eighty first year when he passed calmly into eternity.<sup>(1)</sup>

From his portrait, taken when already advanced in life, it is evident that he must have been eminently handsome in youth. His modest abode is still pointed out with honest pride to the stranger, together with those of Albrecht Dürer, Lucas Cranach, Peter Fischer and others who, by their genius far superior to that of Hans, have illustrated the ancient and charming city of Nuremberg.<sup>(2)</sup>

---

(1) *Hans Sachs' Leben von Birlheimer.* 1765.

(2) *Hans Sachs und seine Wanderungen* by Fürchtlau. 1849.

---

## CHAPTER XIX.

FURTHER DECLINE OF POETRY, ITS CAUSES. — DEMONOLOGY,  
WITCHCRAFT. — PARACELSUS, CORNELIUS AGRIPPA. — THE  
LEGEND OF DR. FAUST.

With the exception of the prolific muse of honest Hans, neither Meistersänger nor Minnesänger arose to cheer the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and, save the polemical works of Luther, Melanchthon and a few others, the prose literature was at as low an ebb as the poetical. It was a period of transition, of social, political and above all theological conflict; of the latter Germany was the battle field, and this one subject, for a time, engrossed the mind of the nation to the exclusion of every other. But it was not only civil and religious contentions which cast their dark shadows over the land during a great part of this period, and arrested the progress of civilization. The belief in demonology and witchcraft was indeed universally diffused throughout Europe in the middle ages; but no where did it rage with such fearful intensity, such systematic fury as on German soil.

Why women should have been especially selected as the agents of Satan, can be accounted for only by the curse supposed to be entailed on them through the sin of Eve, or by the weakness and vanity so pertinaciously ascribed to them. But in Germany, another and special motive was added to these. Among the ancient Teutonic tribes, females, as we have already mentioned, were honoured as seers and priestesses. When Christianity banished the pagan gods, or rather cast them down from heaven to hell, what had formerly been regarded as divine inspiration was held to be the work of the Devil, and woman the primal cause of the fall, was deemed more especially the property of him by whom she had been already tempted and seduced. The principle of evil personified in Loki, the enemy of the gods, from whom many traits of the Devil of popular belief were undoubtedly borrowed, though already existing in old Teutonic mythology, had there played only a subordinate part. In the middle ages, on the contrary, under the influence of newly awakened conscience, the sense of guilt unfelt, the dread of eternal punishment unknown before, it became the subject of perpetual preoccupation, leading, by a terrible but natural deduction, to the most fearful superstition under which the reason of man has ever bowed.

But although we find many isolated instances of cruel intolerance during the first thirteen centuries of the Christian era, it was not until the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> that the persecution assumed the tremendous proportions it was destined to attain. A bull of Pope

Innocent the 4<sup>th</sup> declares that, "it having come to his ears that in various parts of Germany, persons forgetting or denying the Christian faith have dealings with the Devil, he commands all such guilty individuals to be seized and punished forthwith, with loss of property and life". (1) This was enough to kindle the long smouldering fire, and the work on sorcery and witches, the *Malleus Maleficarum* or witches' hammer, which appeared soon afterwards with the approbation of the theological faculty of Cologne, fanned it into a blaze.

The first part of this singular production consists of indications how to discover the presence of the Devil; the second, how to preserve one's self against sorcery; the third, in directions for the examination and tortures of the wretched victims.

The fate of a great portion of the female sex during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially in the north, was by no means to be envied. Elsewhere the persecution was limited, in some degree, to the old, the ugly and the poor; but in Germany, neither rank nor age could afford any exemption from suspicion and torture. In this respect, at least, there reigned a horrible equality.

The young, the fair, and the noble were stretched upon the rack and bound to the stake beside the wretched and shrivelled hag who had nothing but her life to lose. It was women who, according to popular belief, formed the greater part of the as-

(1) Scherr, Cultur und Sitte. p. 243.

semblage on the Brocken,<sup>(1)</sup> and of those foul beings who, at dead of night, were supposed to dig up the newly buried corpses to feast upon their blood. Our readers may perhaps remember the story of the huntsman who, having cut off the paw of a wolf which had attacked him, found on reaching home a woman's hand in his bag with a wedding ring on the third finger which he recognised as his wife's. Snatching away his lady's mantle, he beheld her left hand severed from her arm. And on the faith of this ridiculous story, invented probably by a worthless husband to get rid of an unoffending wife, the wretched woman was condemned and burnt.

No absurdity, indeed, was too great to be believed in those days, and volumes might be filled with these sad records of human crime and credulity. Among other tales, we find that of a man who, having been reduced to the depths of poverty, was surprised to find that his wife provided him with meat every day for dinner. Pressed to discover how she obtained it, she at last promised to reveal the secret on her husband swearing never to disclose it, and not to utter a word whatever he might behold. They set out together and, on reaching a meadow where a flock of sheep was grazing, the woman suddenly turned into a wolf and, seizing a sheep in her jaws, carried it off. Her husband stood mute with terror and amazement; but when he beheld dogs and shepherd set off in pursuit, alarm for his wife's safety and,

---

(<sup>1</sup>) The principal of the Harz mountains where the witches were supposed to assemble to celebrate their sabbath.

(<sup>2</sup>) L'Allemagne par Heine.

perhaps, regret for the loss of the good dinner with which she had just provided him, though by such questionable means, overcame his prudence and "Oh Margaret!" burst from his lips. In an instant the wolf had disappeared and the wretched woman stood convicted of her guilt (1).

Some of these tales bear traces of considerable powers of imagination.

At the foot of a blackened rock, which still attracts the traveller's gaze, once stood a hermitage where two knights, a father and a son, spent their days in prayer and vigils to prevent the foul band which haunted that gloomy wood from rushing forth into the peaceful valleys beyond. Both had been warriors: the hair of the sire was silvered with age, but over the son's bright locks scarce five and twenty summers had flown. One day, as the younger of the hermits was cutting down a pine tree some distance from his retreat to feed his evening fire, he saw a wolf stealing amid the thicket. To fling his axe at its head and to rush forward in pursuit was the work of a moment; but the wolf had vanished and, in its stead, a lovely maiden lay pale and bleeding before him. Struck with anguish and remorse, he knelt down beside her and learnt from her trembling lips that she had meant him no harm; that she was gathering herbs for her father, a mighty wizard, and she implored him to bear her to her home. But to that, the hermit would not listen. He conveyed her to his cell where he tended her, night and day.

---

(1) Grimm's Mythologie. Vol. 2d.

mingling his cares with pious exhortations and solemn warnings. His success was greater than he had hoped. The sorcerer's child saw the guilt of her former ways, became a Christian and implored baptism: nor did the youth perceive, till too late, that in saving her soul he had lost his own heart. Visions of earthly joys began to replace those of heavenly bliss and, ever and anon, almost unconsciously, the idea of throwing aside the hermit's cowl and girding on once more the warrior's sword, of returning to the world he had renounced with the loved and lovely one at his side, would float before his mind.

The day for administering the holy rite of baptism was fixed, when the maiden implored her deliverer to lead her to the spot where they had first met, that she might there render thanks to the Supreme Being for the mercy he had vouchsafed her. He consented, though not without a dark presentiment of ill. The sunset was exquisitely beautiful; not a cloud obscured the summer sky and all nature seemed to rejoice; but as they approached the haunted forest, the face of heaven began to darken and sounds of gibbering laughter filled the air. In vain the hermit besought his companion to retrace her steps; she neither heard nor heeded; still they advanced, while gaunt and fearful spectres began to hem their path: nearer they pressed and nearer; the youth gazed upon the face of his beloved; but he recognised it no longer, so wild and fearful was its expression. He sought to take her hand in his, but she tore it from him and, with an unearthly laugh, sprang towards the grisly throng, and all

vanished from his view. Next morning the hermit was found dead upon the spot, his hands yet clasped in prayer. (1)

The reformation while sapping men's belief in so many doctrines which, right or wrong, were consecrated by time and authority, did not even touch these baneful superstitions which formed one of the curses of the middle ages; nor did it, in the slightest degree, suppress the cruel persecutions to which they had given rise. Luther was himself a devout believer in witchcraft and in the bodily presence of the Spirit of Evil upon earth. We know he threw his inkstand at his head. The mental conflicts, the harassing doubts, the fearful struggles between nature and faith which so tormented him, he ascribed to the visible agency of the Devil. It was likewise his firm persuasion like that of most of his contemporaries, that the lame, the blind and the dumb were possessed, and he declared that those physicians who attempted to cure them by ordinary means were blockheads. (2) It is singular enough to contemplate this extraordinary man with an intelligence so daring, a mind so powerful, who could break the trammels of the church he had been accustomed to reverence and trample alike on popes and prelates, yielding to all the superstitions of his time, gravely declaring that Satan steals children and substitutes imps, or Kollcrofts as the Saxons call them, in their stead, and adding that such children should be thrown into the river, for that

---

(1) Sauber und Saubereit von Hörl.

(2) Zischreben.

they were only masses of flesh and blood without souls.<sup>(1)</sup>

With this deeply rooted conviction in witchcraft and demonology, it is not surprising that Luther should have lent the prevailing superstition the whole weight of his authority. His nature generous, humane and easily moved to pity, despite the violence of his passions, would have shrunk with horror from the mere thought of inflicting torture on any human being; but, in his eyes, witches were not human beings. They were the devil personified and, as such, excited no compassion in his mind.

At first the potentates spiritual and temporal hesitated to sanction these fearful practices; but, as two thirds of the possessions of the hapless victims were forfeited to church and state, their scruples were quickly silenced. The rest was assigned to the informers, the hangmen, &c. an arrangement which called forth whole swarms of this hateful brood. In a single village, containing two hundred souls, the executioner earned, in three months, no less a sum than one hundred and sixty thalers or about twenty six pounds sterling by the burning of Hags alone, and it is tolerably certain that, at least, one half of the accusations were the result of mere cupidity. Rich and poor, young and old were alike subject to this deadly suspicion. Every earthly misfortune was attributed to sorcery, and those who doubted its existence were the first victims. If the wretched beings refused to confess, they were subjected to the most fearful tortures. By the law, indeed, these were limited

---

(1) *Eijgheten.* 216.

to a quarter of an hour at a time; but they were often continued, with little intermission, for days together till the miserable creatures, maddened by agony, confessed every thing that was asked of them and more to boot. Some few, nevertheless, found in their sense of outraged innocence, an almost super-human fortitude. A maiden of Ulm, of good family, endured the rack nine times, and still persisted in her declaration of innocence. After a long imprisonment, she was at length released to die soon after, the victim of the fearful sufferings she had undergone.<sup>(1)</sup> Those who revoked their confession were invariably burnt alive; the rest occasionally obtained the commutation of their sentence to strangling ere the flames reached them. In one small town in Bavaria, forty eight women were burnt in the year 1582. In the bishopric of Bamberg, out of a population of one hundred thousand souls, two hundred and twenty five women were consigned to the flames between 1627 and 1630. In short, in the course of the century during which this fearful persecution was at its height in Germany, from 1580 to 1680, it is calculated that above a hundred thousand individuals, nine tenths of whom were women, were its victims.<sup>(2)</sup> To the honour of humanity be it said, some voices were raised against this bloodthirsty insanity; but they were drowned in the general clamour. In every part of Germany, protestant or catholic, the same atrocities were committed. At length, in the year

---

(1) Scherr, *Cultur und Sitten der Deutschen.* p. 372.

(2) Scherr, *Cultur und Sitten der Deutschen.* p. 378.

1631, the noble hearted Count Frederick Stein, himself a member of the order of jesuits, an order which had been among the most violent denouncers of sorcery, ventured to step boldly forward and declare that, among the many whom he had accompanied to the scaffold, there was not one whom he could confidently declare guilty. "Treat me so", he added, "treat in this manner the judges or the heads of the church, subject us to the same tortures, and see if you will not discover sorcerers in us all."

Despite this burst of generous indignation, it was not until 1694 that this incomprehensible insanity began to abate. The last so called witch burnt in the German empire was a poor nun, aged 70, in the year 1749, at Berg. But at Glarus, in German Switzerland, an execution of a similar nature took place as late as 1794: this time the victim was a servant girl accused of having practised diabolical arts to lame the child of her employers.<sup>(1)</sup>

Germany, indeed, seemed to live and breathe in an atmosphere of sorcery. The ground which Faith had lost, Superstition made her own. But while so many miserable beings expiated the involuntary sin of being born women, more than one bold impostor of the nobler sex availed himself of the universal belief in demonology to claim supernatural powers, and to palm upon mankind all sorts of schemes of philosophy one more extravagant and fanciful than the other. The most celebrated of these, Paracelsus and Cornelius Agrippa, present a strange mixture of fanaticism and

---

(1) *Sauber und Sauberet*, von Herst. 1839.

superstition, and, while speculating on the credulity of others, became in some degree the dupes of their own. The theories of the former, into the details of which we shall not attempt to enter, may at least claim one merit, that of having sought to replace, by graceful and laughing images, those sombre spectres which the superstition of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries had conjured up in such terrible profusion. His doctrine, that the elements were peopled by beings unseen by man, save when they pleased to render themselves visible, was too much in accordance with the vague and romantic tendencies of the German mind not to attract many disciples, even in that gloomy and unimaginative age; while at a later period, when poetry awoke from its long slumber, the system interwoven with others still more fanciful formed the basis of those fables with which the Rosicrucians, amused and puzzled the world, and of which we shall have to speak hereafter. How completely the magic powers of Paracelsus were credited in his own age, is proved by the legend we have already related (<sup>1</sup>) one only of many of which he is the hero.

The system of necromancy imagined by Cornelius Agrippa, while bearing some analogy to that of Paracelsus, was less poetic; instead of nymphs he invokes demons who always speak Hebrew as the oldest tongue, though why that should have induced them to select it is rather difficult to say. His reputation was that of a wizard and sorcerer who had sold himself to the devil, while Paracelsus seems to

---

(<sup>1</sup>) See page 320.

have been regarded as having obtained dominion over the infernal world, rather by his wondrous genius and deep studies than by any unholy compact. In a curious old work written in 1572 entitled "Promptuarium Exemplorum" (1), in other words a treatise on the duties of man and the sin of sorcery, we find frequent mention of Agrippa. He was constantly accompanied, we are told, by a black hound which was in fact no other than the Devil in *propria persona*; and, when seized with his last illness, was heard to exclaim with fury: "Go, damned hound!" back to the gulph whence thou hast sprung; it is thou who hast dragged me down to perdition;" on which the dog, with a wild howl, disappeared. A sound as though of thunder rent the air, and Agrippa with a frightful groan breathed his last.

It is not wonderful at a period when the belief in magic was so universal and so firmly rooted, that the legend of Faust should have obtained unbounded popularity; it embodied all the dire superstitions, the idle terrors, the thirst for the strange and wondrous, peculiar to the middle ages, together with that tendency to sacrifice the future, however precious, nay salvation itself, to immediate gratification which is one of the most universal and most enduring characteristics of the human mind in all times and all nations.

The oldest of the German works, or "Volksbücher" upon Dr. Faust, appears to be that of Frankfort "Historia von Dr. J. Faustus, dem weitbeschreiten Zauberer" etc.

---

(1) *Promptuarium Exemplorum* or *Geschichte und Grempelbuch der heiligen zehn Gebote Gottes*, von Andrew Hornsdorff, Pfarrer zu Drossig. Frankfurt am Main 1572.

by one Johann Spiess who declares, in his preface, that he received the manuscript from a friend at Spire.<sup>(1)</sup> This description of book was almost the only popular literature of the middle ages and was eagerly read by the people. "The old Frankfort history", says Heine, "is more poetic, has infinitely deeper meaning and is much more symbolical than the other, by George Rudolph Widman, published in 1599; yet the latter acquired by far the most extensive popularity".<sup>(2)</sup> In 1594 appeared a work by an individual terming himself Tholeth Schotus, purporting to be a translation from the Spanish upon Faust's disciple and assistant Wagner, whose pranks and adventures were frequently ascribed to his renowned master. It was more particularly the marionettes which took up the theme of Dr. Faustus. and drew delighted audiences to witness the strange adventures and terrible end of the sorcerer, to which the peculiar nature of the *dramatis personæ* gave something at once grotesque and piquant. Those who would learn to what perfection marionettes had already been brought in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, have only to turn to the learned and interesting work of Monsr. Magnin.<sup>(3)</sup> These little puppets indeed, as we have seen, for a time almost superseded ordinary performers. Among the Faust dramas, as they were called, which were represented on this mimic stage, one, apparently the most popular, has been preserved to us. It thus commences:

---

(1) Historia von Dr. Johann Faustus dem weit berühmten Zauberer. Frankfurt 1566 by Johann Spieß.

(2) Widmann's wahrhafte Historie des Dr. Faustus sc. Hamburg 1599.

(3) Histoire des marionnettes.

**FAUST ALONE IN HIS STUDY.**

So far have I brought it with learning and might,  
That every where I am laughed at outright;  
All books and all learning I've made my own,  
And yet cannot find the philosopher's stone.  
Jurisprudence and medicine I know by heart;  
There's no help save in the wizard's art;  
Theology too is useless quite.  
Who'll pay me for many a sleepless night!  
I've not a single coat to my back,  
And creditors too are upon my track.  
With hell I must bind myself in my need,  
All nature's secret depths to read.(1)

He then summons the evil spirits to his presence; when they appear, he enquires whether they are men or women; they reply: "we have no sex". To his further questions as to what form lies hid beneath their gray covering, they answer: "we have no form of our own but, according to thy pleasure, we will assume any in which thou desirest to see us clad; we shall always reflect thine own thoughts". After the pact has been signed by which he forfeits his soul, on condition that all things, in heaven and earth, shall be made known to him, Faust enquires about the construction of the celestial and infernal regions, and having obtained the desired information, observes that it must be too cold in the one, and too hot in the other: and that, after all, earth must be the most agreeable place to dwell in. The demons then present him with a magic ring, through the power of which he suddenly beholds himself transformed into a blooming youth, his threadbare garments changed

---

(1) Faust's Puppenspiel edited by G. Simrod.

to the richest knightly attire, and the loveliest and noblest of dames and damsels only too proud to accept his homage. After many years of pomp and profligacy, he has at last an intrigue with the Signora Lucretia, the most celebrated courtesan of Venice; but soon wearied of her charms, he leaves her and sets sail for Athens, where he woos and wins the daughter of the reigning duke. This treachery reaches the ears of Lucretia who resolves on revenge. She summons the infernal spirits to her aid, and learns from them that all Faust's power will vanish with the ring he wears upon his first finger. Disguised in pilgrim's weeds, Lucretia wends her way to Athens and arrives at the church, at the very moment her faithless lover is about to lead the royal beauty to the altar. Rushing forward, she seizes his hand, tears the ring from his finger and, in an instant, lo! his youthful form, his magnificent attire have vanished and, instead of his golden locks, a few spare gray hairs alone shadow his brow. All start aside with horror and disgust; but the wizard knows not what has occurred and is not less amazed than indignant, when he finds himself turned out of doors like a mangy hound. (1)

There is another puppet-show of which Faust is likewise the hero, but where the demon is called, not Mephistopheles, but Asteroth. The piece commences by Faust's declaration that he is so poor as to be always obliged to go on foot; that not even a milkmaid will kiss him, and that he would gladly sell

---

(1) *The Kloster.* Vol. 2d. p. 26.

himself to the Devil, to get a horse and a lovely princess. The Devil appears accordingly; first in the shape of sundry animals, of a swine, an ox and a monkey. But Faust scornfully tells him he must look more terrible than that, if he expects to frighten him. He then enters as a roaring lion, then as a hissing serpent, but in vain; at last, he presents himself in a human form of the fairest proportions and wrapped in a gorgeous scarlet mantle. In reply to Faust's expression of astonishment, he reminds him that there is nothing at once more hideous and more terrible in creation, than man; that he unites in himself all the vices of the brute creation; that he is filthy as the swine, brutal as the ox, ridiculous as the ape, violent as the lion, venomous as the serpent. When the diabolical bond has been signed and sealed, Astaroth, knowing Faust's desires upon the subject, offers to introduce to him a variety of lovely women of ancient and modern times, among others Judith. Faust, however, not very unnaturally, declines this proposition observing he will have nothing to do with a female executioner. The Demon proposes Cleopatra; but she is considered too voluptuous and above all too extravagant; she had ruined even the rich Antony. "Then I recommend the fair Helen of Sparta," says the Demon adding, as an irresistible incentive, that with her Faust could speak Greek. This proffer being accepted, the learned doctor demands the gift of personal beauty, a splendid garb, and a horse on which to ride to Troy; and when next, he and his familiar appear on the stage, it is on horseback sumptuously attired; "in which costume," observes Heine, "they per-

perform the most astonishing equestrian feats." With regard to the introduction of the fair Helen, which Heine considers as symbolical of the return to the love and study of Grecian literature and art, after it had been so long buried in the darkness of the middle ages, she had, it appears, been more than once summoned by Faust, for the amusement of his auditors, ere he demanded her as his own. Two passages in the oldest Faust-Buch make express mention of this fact, "On Sunday the students came unexpectedly to Dr. Faust's to supper; brought their food and drink with them and made themselves very agreeable. When the wine went round, they talked much of beautiful women, and one of them declared that there was no female form he should be so glad to see as the fair Helen of Greece; on which Dr. Faust commanded that none should speak or rise from table, and left the room. When he returned, he was followed by Queen Helen looking so wonderfully beautiful that the students did not know whether they were in their senses or not, so confused and excited were they. This Helen appeared in a superb robe of purple; her hair fell over her shoulders, bright and yellow as gold, and so long that it reached to her knees; her beautiful eyes were black as coals; her countenance most lovely; her lips red as cherries, with a little mouth and neck like a white swan; cheeks like roses and a tall and straight figure; in short there was not a blemish to be found in her. She gazed at every one in the room with a bold and mischievous expression, so that the students were all inflamed with love for her; but,

as they regarded her as a spirit, they easily mastered their desires, so Helen went out of the room again with Dr. Faust.

As now the miserable Faust gave way to all the lusts of the flesh, he remembered one night the fair Helen of Greece and, in the morning, desired his familiar to bring her to him that he might make her his concubine; which accordingly was done, and this Helen was the very same figure which he had evoked before the students. When Dr. Faust saw her, she took his heart captive, and he could not leave her for a single moment; so that, in the last year they lived together, she brought him a son, with whom he was infinitely delighted and who foretold him many future occurrences. When, however, he came to his terrible end, mother and child disappeared". (1)

Besides the Faust dramas above mentioned, four others have been discovered and published by Scheible in his Kloster. In all these, the scene of the meeting on the Blocksberg (2), or assembly of the witches, is introduced. Here, not only living witches and sorcerers appear, but the spirits of those who have long laid in their graves; here too are fair and noble dames who, despite their rank and birth, have formed a pact with the Devil. She who is the chosen favorite of their infernal master is known by a golden shoe, her only article of attire. All present themselves before their lord who is seated on a throne

---

(1) Historia von Dr. Faustus. Spieß 1588.

(2) In the centre of the Harz Mountains.

of ebony, in the shape of a black Buck with a human face, and kneel down before him; then, rising, kiss him where kisses are not usually bestowed. This done, they join hands, and commence the well known wizard's dance, in which, each turns his back to the other so that, when tried and tortured as they all sooner or later expect to be, they may be able to swear not to have seen their fellow prisoners. If, in the tumult, one of the witches lose a shoe, it is held as a bad omen and as proving that, in the same year, she will be brought to the stake. The musicians, of whom there are always plenty, are either infernal spirits in borrowed forms or wandering Virtuosi who have been seized on the high roads; the blind, are generally preferred. When a new member is admitted, she is solemnly wedded to her infernal lord who confers on her another name, and burns a secret mark upon her body, which is utterly insensible to pain. According to some writers, after the dance a superb supper is served, consisting apparently of the most costly meats and wines, but if any are laid aside till the next day, it is discovered that they are merely dust and ashes. Of course not an atom of salt is to be found. As a mockery of the divine lesson to forgive injuries, the infernal Buck exclaims with thundering voice, "Revenge yourself, if you would not perish." At length to parody the self sacrifice of Christ, the Buck burns himself and every hag rushes forward to seize a portion of the ashes, by aid of which to perform her unhallowed mysteries. But morning arrives, the cock crows and away ride hags and sorcerers, as they came, on cats and

broomsticks, the latter being the favorite mode of conveyance. (1)

That Faust really existed cannot be doubted, and further it is certain that he is quite another person from the celebrated inventor of printing, with whom he has so often been confounded. He lived at the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth. Johannis Manlius in his *Collectaneis*, (2) mentions having known him personally; that he was born at Kundlingen, now called Knittelingen, a town in Würtemberg, and studied magic at Cracow. Weiher or Wierus a contemporary of Faust, mentions him as an intimate friend of Cornelius Agrippa, and Conrad Gessner, grand uncle to the well known poet, gives still more decided testimony of his existence, by speaking of him as one lately deceased and comparing him to Paracelsus.

This is clear and irrefutable testimony and, if there are different opinions as to Faust's birthplace, early education, parentage, &c. these contradictions do not invalidate the fact of his existence. It has been averred that he was born at Prague, because a house, called Faust's house, exists there; but it has been proved that it was built by an inhabitant of the town who happened to bear this ill-omened name. His residence at Wittenberg is disputed; Neumann, (3) in his *Disquisitio historica Fausti*, chapter 1<sup>st</sup>, page 8, insists that Wittenberg is confounded with Würtemberg; but Manlius (4) expressly states that Faust was obliged to

(1) *Des deutschen Mittelalters Volkglauben von Dobenach*. Berlin 1845.

(2) *Collectaneis* p. 160. edit. Basil 1600.

(3) *Disquis histor. de Fausto prestigiatore Witem.* 1693.

(4) *Collect.* p. 38—39.

fly from Wittenberg because the Churfürst had commanded him to be seized and imprisoned. Faust's residence in this town acquires fresh probability when we remember that Melanchthon mentions him in a letter, in no very honourable terms, as an acquaintance he had just made. (1)

An old Erfurt chronicle informs us that Faust received permission from the university to read and expound Homer to the students. As they knew he could perform unheard of things, they begged him to call Homer's heroes from the grave, that they might see them. Faust assembled them in a dark chamber and forbade them to utter a word; he then called one hero after another, and, as he perceived that the students were terrified by the appearance of the one-eyed giant Polyphemus whom he presented with a red beard, and an iron lance in one hand, as a man-eater, Faust pretended that he could not get rid of him; at the same time, they heard a violent noise which was attributed to the giant and by which the house was shaken to its foundation. At this, all the spectators were seized with the utmost terror, and such was the impression made on their minds, that they imagined, and every where declared, the giant had actually seized them with his teeth and was about to devour them, when Faust saved them by dismissing him. This gave the monks the desired opportunity of declaring him a wizard and sorcerer. Dr. Klenginer, the sub-prior of the Franciscans, was sent to convert him and say masses to remove the Devil. As, however, Faust refused to

---

(1) See Scheible, Kloster. Vol. 2. p. 14.

consent to this, the sub-prior gave him over to the Devil, soul and body, and the council sent him out of the town.

In another place which is not named, Camerarius relates that Faust found himself one day in the society of certain choice spirits who summoned him to prove his skill. He enquired what they wished to see, and they unanimously desired that he should make a vine, covered with ripe grapes, start up from the table. Faust complied, and a magnificent vine instantly made its appearance. The deepest silence was to be preserved till he should permit them to cut the grapes. They stood ready, knife in hand, when all at once the grapes vanished, the magic mist disappeared and, on looking at each other, the students perceived that each was holding his neighbour's nose in one hand and a knife in the other, about to sever it, imagining it a bunch of grapes.

That Faust actually resided for a while in Leipsic seems tolerably proved by the pictures still to be seen on the walls of the cellar under Auerbach's house. Even, supposing that all the magic feats attributed to him be mere invention, there can be no possible reason why they should be commemorated at Leipsic in particular, unless it had been or was supposed to have been the scene of his exploits. The first of the above named pictures, shews us Faust drinking with the students, and bears the date of 1525, while the second represents the ride on the wine butt out of the cellar; he is already mounted upon his wooden courser and has commenced his ride. The rest commemorate other passages in his

career. The dog, his faithful companion, is not forgotten. He is differently represented by different authors. Widman describes him as a black hound, Goëthe as a black poodle. Under one of these pictures stand the well known verses:

Dr. Faust a cask bestrode  
And out of Auerbach's cellar rode,  
The cask of wine his legs between,  
As many a mother's child has seen.  
This did he learn thro' his wondrous lore,  
And received the Devil's thanks therefore.

So terrible a magician as Faust could not possibly make his exit from the world in an ordinary way. According to the old "Volksbuch", the time having arrived when the fatal debt was due, Satan appeared in the most hideous form imaginable, bore him aloft through the air, and dashed down his crushed and bleeding limbs upon a dunghill. The exact locality of the spot where this awful catastrophe occurred is disputed, more than one village laying claim to the somewhat equivocal honor. According to an old writer already quoted, (<sup>1</sup>) it was no other than Kreuznach and, indeed, the house is still pointed out where he is said to have perished. So prevalent was the belief, and so universally was it credited that, in the thirty years' war, the enemy's troops having entered the town of Breda on the Elbe, fled thence in terror, on hearing that one of the houses had been the scene of the sorcerers' awful doom.

---

(<sup>1</sup>) Hornsdorf, Theater Hist. p. 188.

Not content with giving Faust credit for all these wondrous powers, posterity has attributed to him a whole system of magic entitled, "Faust's Höllenzwang". This strange production has come down to us in various forms, and it would be difficult to decide which is the original. According to some authorities, the authentic copy exists in manuscript only. Heine asserts, however, that the most famous of all, though fastened by an iron chain to the desk on which it lay, was carried off by some daring hand and was published at Amsterdam in the year 1690.<sup>(1)</sup>

The legend of Faust did not expire with the middle ages. It survived the lapse of time, the change of manners and habits, and was still a favourite among the people, as late as the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when it attracted the attention of Lessing. He has left us two fragments on the subject, the first a complete scene published in his "Letters on contemporary literature", the second, a sketch of the first five scenes of another drama, found after his death. From Lessing it passed into the hands of Goëthe and, transformed by the magic of his genius, became the glorious work of which his nation is so justly proud. In this marvellous production, Goëthe introduces an element foreign to his model, that of the ardent, inextinguishable thirst for knowledge, for its own sake alone. The Faust of the middle ages studied magic and sold himself to the Devil, but with the view of obtaining wealth, power and pleasure.

---

(1) See "Faustus" by Heine. p. 67.

The Faust of Goëthe devotes his nights and days to forbidden lore, not to win the philosopher's stone, not to gain rank and riches, but merely to satisfy his passionate yearning to penetrate into the secret depths of nature. Perhaps, however, it would be more correct to say that the idea remained radically the same, and had only modified itself with the spirit of the age. The reign of intellect was then at its culminating point. The philosopher's stone of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was knowledge, as that of the middle ages had been gold. What is it in the present day? We fear much the same as in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, though we seek it now by other means, by commerce, by speculation and the application made by labour to the discoveries of science. And, here at least, our own period is not less poetic than that which preceded it, while it is certainly far more wonderful; for it has brought into the realms of reality what then existed in those of the imagination alone. The diving-bell lowers every day to the depths of the ocean, even as Alexander was lowered, in the Pseudo-Calisthenes, men who have no pretensions to be sons of Jupiter. The electric telegraph transmits intelligence with a rapidity as marvellous as that of the magic bell, by means of which, the fair Elvara summoned to he aid the royal Arthur and his paladins. The express train would outstrip the steed which, as we find in ancient legend, bore Charlemagne in three days from the plains of Hungary, where he was supposed to have perished, to Aix-la-Chapelle in time to prevent his empress from wedding another. In one element indeed the enchanters of old seem to have surpassed

us. We have not yet acquired the art of riding through the air, either on cats or broomsticks; but we have at least balloons and doubtless ere long we shall solve this problem likewise and accomplish the wizard's most extraordinary feat in an equally successful and more dignified style. Let us hope too, despite the crimes and follies which still disgrace humanity, that we are gradually accomplishing a task more difficult than subduing the elements themselves, and that our victories in the moral world may be no less mighty than those we have achieved in the material.

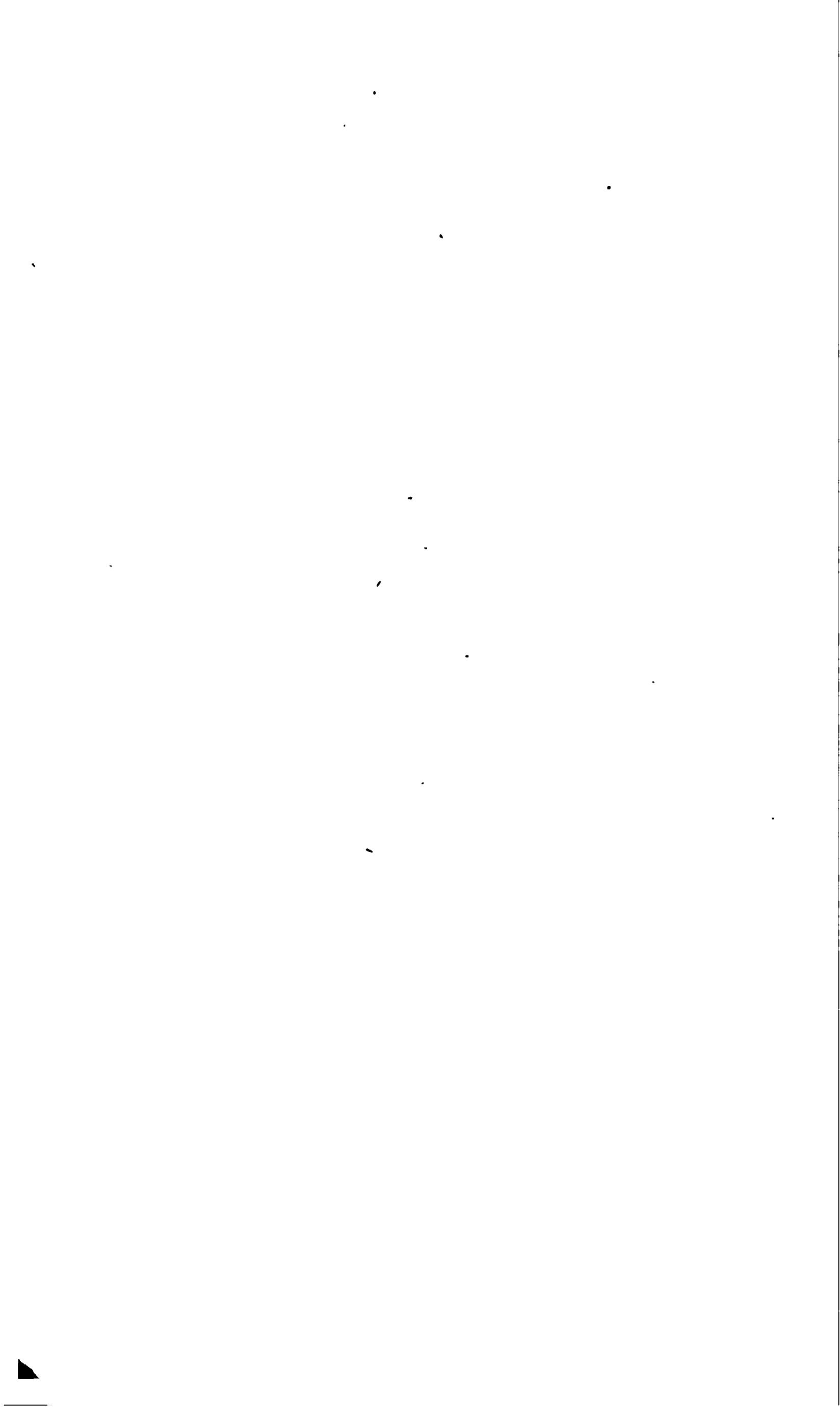
With the legend of Faust we conclude the first part of this work, the romance and poetry of the middle ages. We cannot but perceive how far, in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Germany was inferior in a literary point of view to other nations. For her, in the domains of letters, the Renaissance had scarcely dawned, when it already shone resplendant on the greater part of Europe. In architecture and the arts, in painting and sculpture, its influence was clearly visible; the two latter could boast a Peter Fischer, an Adam Krafft and above all an Albrecht Dürer. Yet we must not overlook the importance of the period at which we are now arrived in the history of Germany, both literary and political. The conclusion of the 16<sup>th</sup> and commencement of the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries were indeed, for her, a period of poetic dulness and stagnation. The Minnesingers' strains had long been hushed for ever; the ruder but still genial song of the Meisters had died away. Of the stately castles, once the scene of knightly splendour, of joust and tournament and

minstrel war, many were a heap of ruins, and the sounds of harp and song which had once resounded there were heard no more. But, if their halls were lone and desolate, the dungeons, where so many wretched victims had perished unknown or forgotten, were likewise empty. To perpetual civil conflict, to feudal tyranny and baronial strife, had succeeded, not indeed general peace and prosperity, but at least comparative security. Commerce was extending, agriculture improving; the peasant, long regarded as a beast of burthen, was beginning to assume his just rights, and a better and brighter era seemed to dawn upon Germany and on mankind. Unhappily the thirty years' war was soon to darken this sunny prospect and again spread gloom and carnage over the devoted land.

---

P A R T S E C O N D.

---



## CHAPTER I.

CALAMITOUS RESULTS OF THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR. — SLOW AND GRADUAL REVIVAL OF POETRY. — THE VARIOUS SCHOOLS. — OPITZ, PAUL FLEMING, ANDREAS GRYPHIUS, PAUL GERHARD. — THE KÖNIGSBERG SCHOOL. — LOHENSTEIN AND HOFFMANSWALDAU. — THE WATER-POETS. — BROCKES.

We have already dwelt on the dearth of poetic talent in Germany during the greater part of the sixteenth century, and adverted briefly to the apparent causes: the absorption of the public mind by the religious schism, the atrocities attending the Peasant-war, and other circumstances less weighty in themselves, but tending equally to the same result. In the following age, when a general revival of letters had taken place throughout Europe, we might have expected that Germany would have claimed her rightful place in the intellectual world; but the Thirty Years' war which raged without intermission during the first half of that period, was in many respects still more fatal to the progress of human intellect than any of the events of the preceding century. True, it called forth generals and statesmen of no common order. It brought to light the genius of a Wallenstein. It gave

birth to great crimes and great virtues; but it banished, at least to a very great extent, both poetry and literature. The condition of the whole country, indeed, was melancholy to an almost unexampled degree. Fields once golden with corn, valleys gay with orchards and dotted with smiling hamlets, were now one scene of desolation. Nothing met the eye on every side save ruined castles, smouldering villages, families driven from their homes to perish by the road-side of cold and starvation, or to swell, in their despair, the bands of robbers and assassins with which the country was overrun. Famine and pestilence, following on the track of war, destroyed even more than fire and sword. All reverence for laws human or divine was forgotten; rapine and violence reigned on every side. "The soldier", says the poet in whose hands after a lapse of nearly two hundred years this stormy epoch became the source of one of the finest dramas of modern times, "the soldier was ruler. The commander of an army was a far more important personage in the land than the rightful lord. All Germany was full of these petty tyrants, and the country suffered equally from its enemies and its defenders".<sup>(1)</sup> It is computed that during this fatal thirty years Germany lost two-thirds of her population. In Saxony alone nine hundred thousand human beings perished. Augsburg from a population of eighty thousand souls found herself reduced to eighteen thousand. Munich, Nuremberg and almost every city of any importance shared the same fate.<sup>(2)</sup> "The country", says a contemporary

(1) Schiller's dreißigjähriger Krieg. Vol. 2d. p. 256.

(2) Menzel, Geschichte der Deutschen. Vol. 3d. p. 96.

writer, "is steeped in grief, shame and anguish to the very ears. It lies under the curse of God for all the crimes, sins and vices of which it has been the theatre. The thousands of innocent beings slaughtered in this war cry day and night for vengeance. Every village is full of corpses,—men, women, children, horses, swine and oxen, lying side-by-side, struck down by pestilence and hunger, or devoured by dogs, wolves and ravens, because there remain none to bury or lament them".<sup>(1)</sup>

Under these circumstances the condition of literature in Germany, towards the middle of the seventeenth century, will excite no astonishment, especially when we remember to how low an ebb it had already fallen. Indeed, we are rather inclined to marvel that it not only succeeded in passing through this troubled period without utterly perishing, but even evinced signs of considerable vitality in the very heart of the crisis which desolated the land. From 1620 to 1725, is a period of great importance in its literary history. Not, indeed, that it produced in itself any great work of human genius, but it was the seed-time from which was afterwards to spring a glorious harvest. The change was not sudden. No mighty master rose, like a meteor on a dark horizon, to contrast his solitary splendour with the gloom around. Slowly, gradually but successfully, the intellect of the German people struggled into day. The light of poetry did not, as in the romantic era of the Minnesingers,

---

(1) Betkius. *Excidium Germaniae*.

again burst forth in dazzling blaze only to disappear, apparently to shine no more. This time, it stole upon the land softly, almost imperceptibly, often obscured by clouds, often for a while disappearing behind them, like a pale dawn gradually deepening into a bright morning and, at length, breaking forth into resplendent day. An Opitz, a Lohenstein and a Gottsched, all at the best mere poetasters, followed each other with here and there a genius of superior order, like Paul Fleming or Paul Gerhard, prophetic of better times. Then came Gellert, Gessner and Klopstock. The greater names of Lessing, Herder, Bürger and Wieland appeared in bright succession with their train of lesser luminaries, till all were eclipsed by the glories of Schiller and Goethe.

From 1620 to 1660, a variety of poetic schools formed themselves, which perhaps may be best classed under the head of the different founders and of the countries to which they belong. Of the first, the Silesian school, the well-known Opitz was the leader; then come the Königsberg school, of Dach and Albert; the Nuremberg school, that of Philipp von Zesen and of Holstein. The third part of the seventeenth century gave birth to the second Silesian school of Hoffmannswaldau and Lohenstein and of their opponent Christian Weise, each exercising great influence in its day, but happily none of very long duration, since almost all are equally worthless. Yet, when we consider the utter extinction with which poetry was threatened during the latter period of the 'Thirty Years' war, we shall acknowledge that,

despite all his faults of style and taste, German literature owes no mean debt to Martin Opitz. Though far from a poet, in the true sense of the word, since he had neither passion, imagination nor elevation of thought, he possessed critical acumen, considerable facility of versification and, above all, that every day good sense which rendered his productions fitted for the era in which they were written and the minds to which they were addressed. By more than one critic Opitz has been condemned with great severity, as base and truckling, whether with or without reason, is not quite clear. It is certain he succeeded in conciliating the most conflicting opinions, but whether this was the result of unblushing servility or exquisite tact, appears uncertain.

Opitz's whole career was one continued series of triumphs. Born in 1597, of respectable family, his amiable manners and cheerful disposition made him, even in childhood, a general favourite. At school and at college he won the good will of masters and pupils. Few men indeed have ever been gifted with the talent of gaining all hearts in a higher degree than Opitz. In 1622 he was named professor of philosophy at Weissenburg and attracted crowded audiences by the eloquence, if not the learning, of his discourses. The first edition of his poems, in 1626, was hailed with a burst of applause absolutely incomprehensible. In 1626 he was appointed secretary to the Burgrave von Dohna and, a few years later, was ennobled by the emperor. In 1636 we find him Royal Polish Secretary and historiograph, and his

good fortune terminated only with his life. He died of the plague at Dantzic, August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1639. (1)

Opitz's poems do not present sufficient interest to justify any extracts. But his translations from the Greek were far superior to his original productions, and his version of the Antigone of Sophocles is still esteemed in Germany.

Far superior in genius to Opitz was Paul Fleming, although belonging to the same school and regarding his master with an admiration not a little astonishing in one so infinitely excelling him in all that constitutes true poetry. Son of a Lutheran clergyman, Fleming was born the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 1609, at Hartenstein in Voigtland. He received his education in the then celebrated school of Meissen, whence he was sent to Leipzig to pursue the study of medicine, to which he intended devoting himself. Here he remained till 1634, when he repaired to try his fortunes in the little Duchy of Schleswig-Holstein. The duke, to whom he had been personally recommended, had just entered into a negotiation with the Czar of all the Russias, and was about to dispatch an embassy to his court. A journey to Moscow, in those days, was attended with great excitement and some little peril, and Russia, just emerging from barbarism under the tutelary genius of its extraordinary sovereign Peter the Great, was an object of mingled curiosity and amazement to all the civilized nations of Europe. But the possible danger only lent the expe-

---

(1) Ten editions of Opitz's works were published in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Bouterwek. Vol. 10th. p. 89.

dition an additional charm in the eyes of a youth burning for adventure, and he applied for and, without much difficulty, obtained the post of "Hof-junker", or gentleman of the chamber, to the embassy. (1) Still, though full of ardent aspirations and love of enterprise, Fleming's mind was always deeply tinged with religious feeling, as is evident from the following hymns written at the moment of his departure from his native shores, and still regarded as among the gems of German sacred poetry.

### IN ALL MY DEEDS I CALL UPON THE LORD.

Only let nothing grieve thee,  
 Poor heart, be still!  
 Howe'er the Lord bereave thee,  
 Bow down my will!

Why all this useless sorrow  
 For the morrow?  
 Will not he  
 Who cares for all,  
 Whate'er befall,  
 Care too for thee?

He rules thy fate, calmly await  
 The Lord's behest.  
 Who all things sees, what he decrees  
 Must be the best.

(1) The description of this journey will be found in a curious old work by one Ascanius, d'Oliva, a Persian scholar of some eminence and known by his translation of Lokman's fables and Shaw Saadi's Gulistan, 1654.

IN ALLEN MEINEN THATEN LASS ICH DEN  
HÖCHSTEN WALTEN.

In evéry deed and word  
Will I consult the Lord,  
The God of earth and heaven;  
For both in word and deed,  
If either shall succeed,  
That counsel must be given.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

He will my sins forgive,  
Will bid the suppliant live,  
And hear my humble prayer;  
Nor hastening to consume,  
Pronounce my awful doom,  
And plunge me in despair.

At His supreme command,  
I quit my native land,  
His signal I obey:  
My steps He will befriend,  
His blessing will attend,  
And sanctify my way.

E'en in the desert wide,  
Christ still is at my side;  
'Mid Christians shall I fear?  
My aid in every need  
Will with the Eternal plead  
And save me there as here.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

When I awake from sleep,  
 Or sink to slumber deep,  
 Or when those slumbers cease;  
 In sickness or in health,  
 In poverty or wealth,  
 His word will bring me peace!

. . . . .

To Him myself I give  
 Whether to die or live,  
 In every land or clime,  
 To-morrow or to-day,  
 Be that His care to say;  
 He knows the fitting time.

. . . . .

My soul is all his own;  
 I trust in him alone  
 Who drew me forth from night.  
 Submissive to thy nod,  
 My father and my God!  
 Whate'er thou dost is right.

Fleming's journey was prosperous, and desirous to continue a mode of life which pleased him so well, he obtained permission to accompany the embassy on its return from Moscow, in the spring of 1635, to the court of Persia where it seems the duke had also some private business. If the prospect of the ice and snows of Moscow had not damped the ardour of the young poet for travelling, how much more must it have been excited by the hope of beholding that ancient and far-famed land of romance and song, to

visit which, it seems, had always been the brightest daydream of his imagination. He set out in the highest spirits, but a variety of unforeseen calamities soon damped his joy. The vessel in which he and his companions embarked was twice shipwrecked, and when at length arrived at the place of their destination, they had to endure annoyances of all descriptions which, together with the hardships he had already undergone, produced a deleterious effect on the health of Fleming, never very robust. On his return however, in 1639, he appeared considerably better and his recovery was aided by the prospect of domestic happiness. At Revel, where he passed a few days on his way back from Persia, he had accidentally met a wealthy merchant, a compatriot, who charmed by his manners and conversation, invited him to his house and introduced him to his daughter. The intimacy between the young people soon ripened into love, and the good father, who desired a happy rather than a splendid union for his child, promised his consent and blessing so soon as Paul should have commenced regular practice as a Physician. Cheered by this hope, he hastened to Hamburg, the scene of his future labours, and was on the very eve of realizing all his brightest dreams of earthly bliss, when he was seized with a fever which carried him off the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 1640. His poems and hymns were published only after his decease. Those we have cited are still sung in the churches of Germany and, as we see, their warmth, feeling and sweetness of versification raise them far above most of the productions of that age.

Andreas Gryphius, though decidedly inferior to Fleming, is not destitute either of force or originality. If Fleming loved to dwell on the bright side of human nature, Gryphius delights in depicting her darker hues. True, the colours in which life presented itself to his view were sombre enough, at least during a great period of his career, and the sufferings of his youth probably threw a gloom over his whole after existence.' He was born in Silesia in 1616. While yet a child, he was attacked by repeated fevers so severe as to place his life in the greatest danger. At nine years old, he lost his father, it is said by poison, and three years later his mother whom he fondly loved. The thirty years' war was at its height. The country was devastated by the Austrian troops, and the poor orphan found himself compelled to fly the humble cottage, the only inheritance that devolved on him. He betook himself to Holland and thence to Italy, France and England, gaining his bread as best he could and often indebted for it to casual charity. At length, in 1647, he ventured to return to the home of his childhood and to seek out some of those who had known his family in former times. And now better days approached. His talents attracted attention, he obtained employment, though of what sort we are not exactly informed, and, a still more fortunate event, won the heart of the daughter of a respectable tradesman who, with her hand, bestowed on him no inconsiderable dowry. He was afterwards appointed syndic of the little principality of Glogau and continued in this office till his death in 1664.

Many of Gryphius's hymns are still favourites in the land of his birth. But he has another and more important claim on our attention. He it was who first gave unity and order to the German drama. His tragedies, worthless as they are compared with those of any French or English writer of the same period, are immeasurably superior to all contemporary productions of a similar description in his own country. There is little action. The style is verbose and turgid, full of long and bombastic tirades, but the *dramatis personæ* have, at least, a certain individuality to which on the German stage they had till then been strangers.

Two of these tragedies had great success. One is called "Leo Armenio, Emperor of Constantinople, or, the Fürsten-Mord", the other "Catherine, Queen of Georgia". The latter is not devoid of interest. The heroine, after long defending her little kingdom successfully against the monarch of the East, is at length defeated, taken prisoner and conveyed to the capital of her conqueror. Here, repulsing the dishonourable offers of the Persian king, she is subjected to the most cruel tortures and at length burnt alive. The character of Catherine is well sustained. She is throughout calm, dignified and heroic, though her speeches are of rather unconscionable dimensions. Careless of her own doom, her courage fails her only when she thinks of her son whom she has left behind her, exposed to a thousand perils. Ah!, she exclaims:

Ah! fetters, anguish, all  
The woes, the sufferings that on my head may fall,

Are but child's play; my fate I never will bemoan.  
My son, my hapless son! I think on thee alone.  
Oh! if the lightning shaft spare but thy tender head;  
If thy young blood, at least, the monsters have not shed!  
Ye, who regard as blest a prince's destiny,  
Who envy us our lot! mistaken! look at me.  
Death early tore alas! my parents from my side:  
But when the Georgian prince selected me as bride,  
When in my youthful hand the golden sceptre placed,  
When with his diadem my virgin brow he graced,  
Who did not deem me blest?

In his tragedy of Charles the 1<sup>st</sup>, the author evinces a zeal for the royal sufferer, as warm as ever animated the most loyal cavalier; unfortunately the piece, which is one of his very worst, was not likely to recommend the cause it espoused. Gryphius is not contented with bringing living actors on the scene. He summons likewise the shades of the departed, not only of Mary, queen of Scots, but likewise of Wentworth, and of Archbishop Laud who, though executed at the commencement of the piece, start up around the scaffold of the martyred king. Charles himself, after a speech of two hundred lines, is decapitated in the presence of the audience and hardly has the blow fallen, when his ghost, rising, demands vengeance on his murderers. Nemesis appears with all her serpents and denounces the full vial of her wrath on England's head, unless she repent and mourn her sin in dust and ashes.

Gryphius' comedies coarse, vulgar and longwinded as they are, evince a considerable improvement on the mysteries, the Teufelsspiele and other strange performances already noticed; yet we believe no

English reader would have patience to peruse them. His works have become very scarce and probably do not offer sufficient interest to justify a new edition. (1)

It would afford but little entertainment to the reader, were we to dwell on the crowd of imitators who sprung up on the traces of Opitz, Fleming and Gryphius. But there is one name that must not be omitted, one writer belonging to no peculiar school, but possessing beauties which would entitle him to a high rank in any age. Paul Gerhardt, shines forth a bright star in this period of dulness or mediocrity. The well-known poem "Befiehl du deine Wege," of which we insert a translation, is, observes Villmar, the most costly pearl in the wreath of German sacred poetry, and the noblest gem in the Evangelical church. (2)

Paul Gerhardt was born in Saxony in 1606, where his father was Burgomaster. Of his childhood nothing is known, but hardly had he attained his 12<sup>th</sup> year, when the terrible thirty years' war broke out, and his family seem to have suffered much by its ravages. Forced for a while to quit his native land, he was recalled, in 1631, to fill the office of preacher to the Nicolai-Church at Berlin, where he remained for ten years, honoured and respected by all who knew him. But his religious sentiments did not wholly coincide with those of the king, and Gerhardt, too conscientious and too enthusiastic to

(1) The only complete edition extant is of 1662 and thus entitled "Andreas Gryphii Freuden und Trauerspiele auch Orden und Scenette, in Breslau zu finden bei Jacob Fretschorn. Leipzig 1662."

(2) Villmar's Geschichte der deutschen Literatur.

affect opinions he did not entertain, was deprived of his appointment, and ordered to quit the country. Utterly destitute, not knowing where to lay his head or how to provide for his helpless family, Gerhardt left the home where he had spent so many happy years. But no affliction, however terrible, could shake his confidence in divine wisdom and mercy. After some consideration, he determined on directing his steps to his native land, Saxony, where he yet hoped to find friends. The journey, performed on foot, was long and weary; Gerhardt bore up manfully; his heart failed him only when he gazed on his wife and his little ones. When night arrived, the travellers sought repose in a little village inn by the road-side, where Gerhardt's wife, unable to restrain her anguish, gave way to a burst of natural emotion. Her husband concealing his anxious cares reminded her of that beautiful verse of scripture "Trust in the Lord; in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." The words uttered to comfort his afflicted partner impressed his own mind so deeply, that seating himself in a little arbour in the garden, he composed that hymn which has rendered his name celebrated. The translation we append of some portions of this poem, though very literal, will, we fear, disappoint those who, from our eulogiums, may have formed high expectations of the original: for it is scarcely possible to render in a foreign tongue, without degenerating into the common place or vulgar, that holy simplicity, that pure devotional feeling which form the great and peculiar charm of the original:

Commend thy ways, O mortal!  
 And humbly raise thy sighs  
 To Him who in His wisdom  
 Rules earth, and sea, and skies.  
 He who for all has found a spot,  
 Wind, wave, and tempest dread,  
 Will find a place, oh doubt it not!  
 Thy foot can likewise tread.

In Him alone confide thou must  
 Ere He will bless thy deed;  
 In His work must thou put thy trust,  
 If thy work shall succeed.  
 Murmur, and vain repining  
 And effort, all will fail;  
 God will not listen unto those;  
 Prayer can alone prevail.

All means and ways possessing,  
 Whate'er he does is right;  
 His every deed a blessing,  
 His steps one path of light.

To thee it is not given,  
 The tempest's rage to quell;  
 God reigns supreme in Heaven  
 And all He does is well.

True, it may seem a moment,  
 As though thou wert forgot;  
 As though He were unmindful  
 Of thine unhappy lot:  
 As though thy grief and anguish,  
 Reached not the eternal throne,  
 And thou wert left to languish,  
 In sorrow and alone.

But if, though much should grieve thee,  
Thy faith shall ne'er have ceased,  
Be sure he will relieve thee  
When thou expect'st it least.

Then hail! to thee victorious,  
Thou hast and thou alone,  
The honour bright and glorious,  
The conquest and the throne!

This he composed, says his biographer, <sup>(1)</sup> without pause; or effort. It was indeed less a studied composition than the natural outpouring of a devout and humble spirit in the hour of trial. Evening had now deepened, and the pastor and his wife were about to retire to rest, when two gentlemen entered the little parlour in which they were seated. They began to converse with the poet and soon told him that they were on their way to Berlin to seek the deposed clergyman Paul Gerhardt by order of their lord, Duke Christian of Merseberg. At these words, Madame Gerhardt turned pale, dreading some further calamity. But her husband, calm in his trust in an over-ruling Providence, at once declared that he was the individual they were in search of and enquired their errand. Great was the astonishment and delight of both wife and husband, when one of the strangers presented Gerhardt with an autograph letter from the duke himself informing him that he had settled

---

(1) Leben und Lieder von Paul Gerhardt.

a considerable pension on him to atone for the injustice of which he had been victim. Then the pious and gifted preacher turned towards his wife and gave her the hymn he had composed during his brief absence, with the words, "See, how God provides! did I not bid you confide in him and all would be well?"

Some years afterwards, Gerhardt was appointed archdeacon at Lubben in which office he continued till his death in 1670.

We must now briefly mention the Nuremberg school, in all respects a contrast to that of Silesia. It abounded in flowery, overstrained expressions and exaggerated pictures of Arcadian life. Nothing can be more insipid than these idylls; they possess none of that natural grace and sweetness which form the charm of Theocritus and Virgil; the shepherds and shepherdesses are as silly, as the flocks they tend, and as stiff and formal as the costumes in which they are painted. The head of this school is George Philip Harsdorfer, a respectable councillor, and Johann Klei, a curate of Rittenger. None of their numerous productions are worth quoting. Disgusted by these vapid absurdities, another school formed itself in Holstein around Johann Rist, a man of highly cultivated taste and considerable attainments, but in whose hands poetry became a mere mechanic art, devoid alike of warmth or nature. With the exception of a very few of his hymns, his compositions are long since forgotten. Nor do we think it worth while to present our readers with any translation.

None of his followers deserve notice except Jacob Schuriger who, under the name of Philidor der Dörferer, wrote some lyrical poems rather above the common order, and dramatic compositions of the most pitiable mediocrity.

One school yet remains to be mentioned, the German "Genossenschaft", or Rose society of Philipp von Zesen. Its style, like that of the Nuremberg school, is overlaid with affectation, and empty sound is, on all occasions, substituted for sense and meaning.

In his anxiety to improve the German tongue, Zesen introduced not only a variety of words of his own composition, but forced many foreign ones into the service, in a manner equally indiscreet and absurd. Nature was considered too vulgar an expression and was superseded by the term Zeugemutter "Fostermother"; an Obelisk was changed into "sunlit pinnacle" and a verse into "a poet's nursing". Even Venus could not retain the title antiquity had bestowed on her and which she had borne for centuries undisturbed. She was transformed into "Lustina". A window was a "day enlightener", and the nose dignified by the appellation of Löschhorn, "extinguisher", a word still retained as a form of contempt or opprobrium. How absurd must have been the result of these extraordinary vagaries may be conceived and, indeed, it is difficult to read one of the few poems of this school that have been left us, with anything like composure.

Zesen lived long and merrily, and went on versifying till his 70<sup>th</sup> year with unabated zeal and absurdity.<sup>(4)</sup>

---

(1) *Georgius*, Vol. 3.

We now come to the second Silesian school of which the leaders long associated with all that is bombastic and inflated were. Christian Hoffman von Hoffmanswaldau and Daniel Caspar von Lohenstein. Opitz had ceased to be regarded with superstitious admiration; but his fall was of little advantage to the literature of his country. The new school, if somewhat superior to the former in correctness and elegance, was, if possible, still more deficient in truth and natural feeling. Hoffmanswaldau was indeed a man of considerable attainments; but his taste had been perverted by the study of the later Italian poets. All the peculiarities of Guarini and Marini he endeavoured to introduce into his own productions which embrace a considerable range of subjects. He forgot that the German tongue is not susceptible of that exquisite harmony, that voluptuous sweetness which lend to Italian poetry, whatever its faults or deficiencies, the charm of a rich strain of music. But Hoffmanswaldau was far outstripped in all his peculiarities by Lohenstein, whose productions are so overlaid with metaphors, allegories and descriptions as to become at times almost unintelligible. To these faults of style are united others more reprehensible, a laxity of morality and occasional indecency at once repugnant to taste and virtue, and utterly unredeemed by originality or fervour of imagination. Yet, strange to say, Lohenstein was in private life a man of the strictest principles. Never, in a single instance so far as we can learn, did he carry into practice those fatal maxims laid down in his poetic

works. His tragedies of which he wrote many are utterly unworthy our notice.

The following extract will give some idea of his style. It is taken, from Arminius, a long poetical romance and is called "The sun's praise of the rose". It is perhaps the most favourable specimen we can give, which is not saying much for it.

She is the queen of every bud and flower;  
 The bride of heaven, child of the morning light,  
 Whom with my rays I gild, in summer bower,  
 Her crown of gold, her leaves of velvet bright,  
 Her stem of emerald sheen, her glow like rubies rare  
 And e'en her very breath with perfume fills the air.

She's an *Epitome* of all that's bright  
 And love himself her only image true;  
 The thorn her dart, the leaves her wings of light  
 And the torch beams in her resplendent hue.  
 True, she must perish in her beauty's bloom;  
 But do not I each evening disappear?  
 Kind heaven, in mercy, saves her from the doom  
 Of slowly withering like the fading year.  
 Bathed with bright dews, her breath sucked by the bees  
 To honey by their cunning art they mould.  
 The morning cools, with perfume laden breeze,  
 And evening bathes her with its tints of gold. (1)

A variety of rhymesters of different grades of insignificance, not attaining even mediocrity, flourished between 1680 and 1704. The school of the water poets, as Vilmar calls it (2) from its cold lifeless style,

(1) Lohenstein's gesammelte Werke von B. Neukirch herausgegeben.

(2) Vilmar's Geschichte der deutschen Literatur.

is too contemptible to detain us long. It consists of about a dozen poetasters whose language was as commonplace as their ideas. Neither will we pause to notice the productions of Christian Günther, of Berthold and of Henry Brockes. The latter, indeed, has been preserved from oblivion by the connexion of his name with that of Gessner who, in his youth, regarded his works with passionate admiration. Nor are they deficient in a certain facility and grace of versification likely enough to please a young and unformed mind. Besides we must remember that Gessner, though a very pleasing writer, was after all no great genius, and that his judgement must not be received without considerable reserve.

---

## CHAPTER II.

STATE OF GERMANY AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR. — GOTTSCHED AND HIS TIME. — LITERARY CONTEST. — BODMAR AND HIS SCHOOL. — HAGEDORN, HALLER, THE SCHLEGELS, GLEIM AND THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR.

A wayfarer, forced to traverse a barren track ere he can reach the fair and fertile region which lies beyond, naturally hastens his steps nor pauses to look around him. Yet, if some patch of verdure, some tuft of wild flowers happen to meet his eye, he gazes on them with a delight which the loveliest valley, the richest blossoms could scarcely inspire at any other moment. Even thus we have lingered fondly on the productions of Andreas Gryphius, Paul Fleming and Paul Gerhardt, while we have passed, and shall continue to pass rapidly over many names which stand recorded in German literary annals, but which have really little or nothing to recommend them to attention. Yet, we are bound to bestow a brief notice on a man who, in his own day, exercised over the literature of his country an influence still more despotic than that of Opitz himself, Abraham Gottsched,

who was born about the commencement of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

A great change had taken place in the condition of Germany during the last fifteen years. We have seen the melancholy condition to which she had been reduced by the thirty years' war. Her cities were depopulated, her villages destroyed, her castles burnt, her fields devastated and, still worse, the virtue and morality of the people had been sapped by the contempt for law and justice, which had prevailed during a great period of that disastrous struggle. Time and peace, however, gradually repaired these injuries and healed the cruel wounds beneath which the land was bleeding. One source at least of contention was done away with. The peace of Westphalia, concluded in 1648, had placed the two contending parties, Catholics and Protestants, on a footing of strict equality and, henceforward, religious conflicts play no part in German annals. Gradually, though slowly, the face of affairs improved; the towns regained their former wealth and importance; the hamlets were rebuilt, the soil again cultivated; while the increase of commerce and the progress of civilization aided in repairing the calamities inflicted by war. New interests sprang up; states, till now insignificant, began to play an important part in the political world. Yet poetry, as we see, continued at so low an ebb that Opitz was regarded as a great genius and when, in 1729, Gottsched published his poems, he was hailed as a star of the first magnitude. Very different is the light in which he is now regarded. His name, indeed, is generally connected

only with the most lamentable poverty of invention, with dearth of imagination, coldness, stiffness and formality. But Gottsched's faults, numerous as they are, must not blind us to his merits. It was he who, by his authority as professor of the university of Leipzig, succeeded in destroying the exclusive supremacy the Latin tongue had hitherto maintained, to the destruction of all attempts at originality, and who asserted the right of the German muse to be heard, at least on her native soil. He also materially improved the style of dramatic composition, and his comedies the "Hanswurst" etc. though common place enough, were still an advance in many respects on those of Gryphius. So completely however was Gottsched deficient in poetic fancy, so great was his dread of any thing like exaggeration either in detail, or in colouring, that his compositions were even more cold and lifeless than those of the "Water poets" themselves. Yet his name was held in such high honour that even Frederick the Great, the contemner of German poetry, permitted him to recite his verses in his royal presence and the journal of which he was the editor reigned for awhile supreme over public taste.<sup>(1)</sup>

A supremacy, built on foundations thus false and narrow, could not remain long unshaken. An opponent was at hand beneath whose vigorous assault the whole edifice was to crumble into dust.

The man to whom Germany is principally indebted for the regeneration of her poetic literature is Jacob Bodmer of Zürich.

(1) Gottsched und seine Zeit von Danzel.

He was born in 1690 and early evinced great intelligence and powers of discrimination. Being destined for the church, he was sent to the college of his native town to study theology, but found it so repugnant to his inclination, that, after many efforts to conquer his distaste, he at length gave it up in despair. His father, though disappointed at his failure, now sent him to Bergamo in Italy in a different capacity, in which he hoped he would succeed better, as clerk to a mercantile house of some eminence. But the ledger and daybook were as little to Bodmer's taste as the Fathers and the Doctors. After repeated remonstrances on the part of his employers, and vain attempts on his own to overcome his antipathy, both gave it up as a hopeless case, and Bodmer returned to the parental roof. Not finding a very cordial reception, he soon removed to lodgings and began a course of lectures, the proceeds of which sufficed to provide for his humble wants. At the same time he took part in editing an antiquarian journal and, in his rare leisure moments, studied English, so as to become thoroughly acquainted with the writers of the age of Queen Anne. Addison was his especial favourite and Sir Roger de Coverly formed his ideal of an English gentleman.

Bodmer's industry and acquirements gradually attracting attention, he was rewarded by an increase of salary and was appointed professor of literature at Berlin. In 1721, he commenced a weekly journal in imitation of the Spectator and continued to write and criticise with unwearyed zeal and assiduity, but without producing any marked effect on the minds

of his countrymen till, in 1752, he published a translation of ‘Paradise Lost’. The opinions expressed in his commentaries, his enthusiastic admiration for the great original, aroused the indignant attention of Gottsched who, with an amusing consciousness of his own poetic sins, regarded it as a personal attack. A paper war ensued, in which Bodmer maintained his ground with energy and talent, and attacked his opponents with so much vigour and skill as to obtain a complete victory, the importance of which can scarcely be overrated. It paved the way for those men of real genius who were to shed such lustre on the German name. Bodmer’s two comedies: “Der Triumph der guten Frau” and “Die stumme Schönheit” were regarded, both by Mendelssohn and Lessing, as possessing considerable merit and were acted with much applause. He enjoyed a privilege seldom vouchsafed to founders of schools, he lived to see the success of his theories. To him we owe the collection of the lays of the Minnesingers, the discovery of the Nibelungen and the Parcival.

Many circumstances had contributed to break the hitherto despotic authority of Gottsched. People were tired of his prosaic and dictatorial tone, especially as he endeavoured to maintain his decaying authority by all sorts of petty stratagems, and he who, but a few years before, was the literary idol of Germany, now found himself almost alone. “He was”, observes Goethe, “the representative of mediocre talent. He

---

(1) He died in 1777 at age of 94.

never could endure Klopstock and always treated his works with affected contempt."

We can afford a few words only to Abraham Gotthelf Kestner, known principally by his epigrams which are indeed powerful and caustic, but like all similar productions the interest of which is wholly confined to a peculiar period, have fallen into complete oblivion. Another, whose works occupying in their own time no inconsiderable place are now almost forgotten, is William Frederick Zacharias. His "Vier Stufen des weiblichen Alters", (four stages of woman's life), enjoyed great popularity in its day.

Among those who stand forward meritoriously at this epoch as the revivers of true poetic feeling, Professor Rammler must not be omitted. Born in 1725, at Kolberg in Pomerania, the whole of his early life was one continued struggle against poverty and trials of various descriptions. A gratuitous education was obtained for him at Stettin whence he was sent, in 1740, to the university of Halle. His assiduous application, his superior talents won the good will of all, and some translations from Horace and other poetical trifles attracting attention, he was named professor of literature at Berlin. Here he composed the odes &c. which procured him so much celebrity. Though somewhat stiff and formal, Rammler's compositions are not deficient in loftiness of tone or melody of versification; still it is difficult to understand how he was ever deemed worthy of the title of the German Horace, bestowed upon him in his own day. The following may be considered as fair specimens; but, as Rammler's merits consist

principally in the smoothness of his versification and the studied elegance of his language, his productions must necessarily lose more in a foreign tongue than those of a higher order of excellence.

### LOVE AND HYMEN.

Hymen once met Love astraying  
Carelessly o'er hill and lea,  
And he stopped him, gaily saying:  
Give thy fillet, boy, to me.

Let us change one with the other;  
The advantage we should find  
Both for thee and me, my brother,  
If thou could'st see, and I were blind.

### TO A PRUDE.

Upon thy cheek the charms of spring are gleaming,  
In thy dark eyes the warmth of summer beaming,  
Autumn's rich treasures grace thy lovely breast;  
Oh! what a paradise 'twere there to rest,  
Far from a world of suffering and sin  
Didst thou not bear a winter deep within.

### SONG.

When Cupid, as in days of old,  
Loved simple cot and shepherd's fold,  
Wand'ring o'er hill and glade,  
A bee, amid the roses hid,  
Stung the fair boy upon the lid,  
While with the buds he played.

The lesson was not thrown away,  
The arch-deceiver, from that day,  
Had learnt another part:  
Concealed amid the flowers he'll lie,  
Spring forth when some fair maid draws nigh  
And sting her to the heart.

Rammler lived to the age of 70, in the enjoyment of uninterrupted health, and expired without a struggle. He never married; and so far as can be discovered, never entertained any serious passion. Yet his heart was kind and affectionate, open to the claims of friendship and of charity.

Though, like Rammler, not gifted with poetic powers of the first order, Frederick von Hagedorn acted still more potently on his age. Of gay and joyous temperament, of highly cultivated mind, he possessed great facility of composition, and his style, without any lofty pretensions, is simple, pleasing and occasionally vigorous. He did much for the amelioration of public taste and, if not equal to any long or elevated flight of fancy, his occasional poems, especially his fables, display both grace and humour. He died the 28<sup>th</sup> October 1754.

We append a translation of the "Soap-boiler", or at least of some verses which it may not be uninteresting to compare with the "Savetier" of La Fontaine of which it is an evident translation with a few alterations and additions.

#### THE MERRY SOAP-BOILER.

Old John the soap-boiler so gay,  
Had loved full many a merry lay,  
And sang with soul no care could grieve,  
From early morn to dewy eve.  
He'd work enough his wants to meet.  
Unless he sang, he could not eat,  
And when he sang he played his part,  
With all his lungs and all his heart.  
At breakfast and at supper too,  
The merry song trilled forth anew;

It sounded far; the measure sweet  
Was heard all down the neighbouring street.  
They listened; whose that blithsome lay?  
T'is John's, the soap-boiler so gay.

• . . . .  
Near him there lived, — he kept his carriage,  
The offspring of a selfish marriage,  
Who haughty, stiff and full of pride,  
With princes in his banquets vied.

• . . . .  
The morning had begun to peep  
When he had just sunk off to sleep,  
And the blithe singer's merry lay  
Soon chased his brief repose away.

• . . . .  
At last, at early morning tide,  
He called the singer to his side  
And said; a word, my merry John;  
Say, how do your affairs go on?  
All praise your wares, they are not dear;  
How much do they bring in per year?

• . . . .  
Per year, I know not what they are;  
I do not reckon quite so far.  
I count by days, and every day  
Brings me enough to pay my way.  
Quite right, but you at least can tell  
What each day brings, that you know well.

• . . . .  
You ask too much for my poor lore:  
Some days bring little, some days more.  
Well pleased with this, the rich man cried;  
Now, all your wants shall be supplied.

Thou'st not a sow thine own to call;  
There's fifty thalers, friend, and all  
I ask is this: give up your song;  
The gold sounds better. Am I wrong?

Hans humbly thanks and steals away  
With fears unknown until that day.  
He clasped the purse, nor could refrain  
To count and weigh and count again.  
The golden treasure rich and bright  
Rejoiced his heart and cheered his sight:  
He looks on it with silent zest,  
And then commits it to a chest  
Well bound with iron clasps and greaves,  
To keep the treasure safe from thieves;  
And not content with this, himself  
He guards at night his precious pelf.

If he but hears the house-dog bark,  
Or the cat mewing in the dark,  
He visits every spot till certain  
That no one lurks behind the curtain,

Now, knocked and cuffed with many a smart,  
Both cat and dog must fain depart.  
Mops, model of the canine race  
Who leapt to see his master's face;  
And Hintz, a cat of beauty rare  
With velvet paw and silky hair.

At length he finds that wealth and cares  
Too oft are pleased to march in pairs;  
That fortune's rich and glowing treasures  
May rob us of those simple pleasures  
Which virtuous souls enjoy alone,  
And gold can never make its own.

Now to his neighbour, whom his lay  
No more disturbed at break of day;  
Take back your wealth, leave me my share,  
My merry song, all free from care;  
I see that gold no heart-ache cures,  
I would not give my life for yours.  
I now am all I was before,  
The merry soap-boiler of yore.

Albrecht von Haller may be regarded as likewise belonging to the Bodmer school and is a striking instance of the instability of human fame. In his own age he was regarded as one of the most distinguished ornaments of the land to which he belonged. Klopstock speaks of his "Alps" as a master piece of descriptive poetry, and indeed there is a truthfulness in his delineations, a deep and passionate love of nature in all her forms, that go far to redeem occasional tediousness and languor. "The poetry of Haller," observes a far greater bard, the immortal Schiller, "is characterized by force, depth and simple pathos. His soul was overflowing with love for the ideal, and his warm appreciation of all that is true and beautiful has aided him to paint, in the quiet valleys of the Alps, that primeval innocence which has long disappeared from a busy and struggling world." Yet, despite this high eulogium and from so great a source, few we think can have read the works of Haller without feeling that the true poetic flame is wanting and of this no one was more conscious than himself.

As a man, Haller was a pattern of every excellence. Born in easy circumstances, he early resolved

on devoting himself to the medical profession. After studying some years under the celebrated Boerhaave he visited England where he was introduced to Sir Hans Sloane and all the leading physicians of the day. On his return to Germany he founded at Göttingen an anatomical theatre and, in 1751, the royal society of sciences in the same town. His life was serene and prosperous, darkened only by one cloud, the early death of a beloved and lovely wife whose memory he celebrated in stanzas which obtained great and not undeserved admiration. (1)

## **ODE TO MARIAMNE.**

Ah! must I sing thine early end?  
My Mariamne, what a strain!  
When sighs with every word contend,  
And render all my efforts vain.  
The joy that in thy love I found  
Deepens my sorrow's gloomy hue,  
Opens afresh the scarce healed wound,  
And makes me feel my loss anew.

Not lays replete with classic art,  
Not poets' plaints my muse can weave,  
But sighs wrung from a broken heart  
Which scarce can all its loss conceive.  
Yet, will I strive to paint aright  
The soul that mourns thine early doom,  
Which now in nothing finds delight,  
Save images of woe and gloom.

<sup>(1)</sup> Leben von Haller von Zimmerman. Zürich 1755.

Where shall I fly? where find I not  
Some image that renews my woe!  
I lost thee in this lowly cot;  
That church, alas! thou sleep'st below.  
Thy children, Oh! how hard a task!  
Whither their lisping prattle flee!  
When for their mother they shall ask;  
Oh! could I only sleep with thee!

Shall I not weep for thee, mine own!  
For thee, my best, my truest friend!  
Who all forsook for me alone,  
Wealth, rank and joy, with me to wend.  
Thy native land, thy father's hall,  
The rights that rank and beauty gave,  
Gladly thou sacrificed them all.  
And all for what? An early grave.

I loved thee with a love concealed,  
Whose strength the world has never known;  
A love scarce unto thee revealed,  
Scarce to myself — till thou wert gone.  
Oft when I clasped thee to my heart,  
The fearful thought that would arise  
The day will come when we must part,  
Brought tears of anguish to my eyes.

In the deep wood's sequestered bower,  
Where I may best my grief secure  
That none disturb my lonely hour,  
There I recall thine image pure:

I picture there thy tender sadness  
Whene'er I left thee for a while;  
When I returned thy gentle gladness,  
Thy fond embrace, thy joyous smile.  
• • • • • • • • • • • • • •

Most dear, most perfect being! thou  
I loved so well when thou wert mine,  
How radiant is thy beauty now,  
That heaven's own beams upon thee shine!  
Oh, does the joyful hope deceive me  
That we shall meet? It is not vain —  
Open thine arms, love, to receive me,  
And let us never part again!

A brief notice of a few other poetical writers of this period, though none are distinguished by talents of very high order, may not be utterly devoid of interest. Among others the two Schlegels though nowise connected with their more illustrious namesakes, and successors, both of whom possessed considerable dramatic genius although disfigured by the vicious taste of the time. Johann Elias, the eldest, produced when a mere boy several tragedies of merit, astonishing in so young a writer. But the bud, though fair, produced neither blossom nor fruit. The few dramatic compositions completed at a riper age and brought forward by Gottsched's interest on the stage at Leipzig, never attracted attention, and soon fell into utter oblivion. Schlegel died at the age of 31.

We must now turn to an author better known as the friend of poets than as a poet himself, whose benevolent and discriminating patronage of all who

needed or deserved his assistance, lent him an importance in his own time his poetic talents could never have assigned him, and won for him the endearing epithet of father Gleim.

Gleim was born in 1719 at Ermsleben, a pretty town in the district of Halberstadt. His father died when he had not reached his 16<sup>th</sup> year and was followed to the grave by his fond and faithful wife, whom not even maternal love, that strongest of passions, could console for his loss. An elder married sister supplied his parent's place so far as her limited means permitted; but when, at the age of nineteen, Gleim left the school where he had been placed, his position was most painful. The little paternal inheritance, divided among nine children, left for each a sum so small as scarcely to provide for their maintenance and education. Nevertheless, by the aid of some generous friends, the youth was enabled to proceed to the university of Halle, where, to eke out his scanty resources, he gave lessons in the classics and soon found sufficient pupils to occupy all his leisure, and considerably augment his funds. His amiable manners, cheerful temper and affectionate heart, endeared him to all with whom he came in contact; and sundry verses which he at this time published, though of little merit in themselves, won him no inconsiderable reputation in the dearth of poetic literature then prevailing. Through the good offices of some of his father's friends, he obtained the post of secretary (dom secretär) to the cathedral of Halberstadt, whither he removed in 1776, and where with the exception of occasional excursions he henceforward

remained. Few lives have passed away in such uninterrupted tranquillity as that of Gleim. Overflowing with benevolence, he found in the exercise of kindness and hospitality, in the friendship of Klopstock and other distinguished men, all the happiness his gentle and affectionate heart desired. Once only, during his long life, did a warmer passion obtain mastery over his soul. In 1752, he became enamoured of a charming girl of whom he thus writes: "I must now confess to you that I love the best of all earthly maidens. Oh! what an exquisite delight is it to love and be beloved!" All indeed seemed well, the wedding day was fixed, when an unexpected circumstance blighted his hopes. His affianced was the only remaining child of a numerous family. Her father clung to her with a love in which seemed concentrated all the tenderness once divided among his other children; nor could he endure the thought that another should engross the heart in which filial love had hitherto reigned supreme. Touched by her entreaties, he had indeed granted an unwilling consent to her marriage; but when the time arrived, he was so utterly overcome by his jealous anguish that the maiden — unheard of sacrifice! gave up her bridegroom and promised to devote herself to him alone. All Gleim's efforts to move her resolution were fruitless. It has been conjectured that other and less holy motives combined to render her inexorable, but of this no proof has been adduced. Gleim consoled himself by adopting his sister's orphan child. But he never loved again.

In 1755, we find Gleim at Berlin where he published his fables, still popular among the youth of

Germany, and the first series of his "songs of a Grenadier".

It was a momentous and a stirring epoch in the history of Germany and above all of Prussia. Once more the flames of discord had begun to rage through the land. The seven years' war had commenced. Germany was divided into two hostile camps.

The heroic attitude, the calm and dauntless courage of the Prussian hero, kindled the enthusiasm of Gleim. From that moment, devotion to Frederick became the master passion of his soul. His war songs, little poetic as they are, suited the spirit of the times and aided in rousing the patriotism of the Prussian nation. "They breathe", says a modern critic, (1) "a fervent love of king and fatherland which exercised a most powerful influence on his contemporaries and served to rouse the nation from its lethargy". Yet we very much doubt whether the songs themselves would, in the eyes of an English reader, justify this high eulogium; therefore we prefer leaving them to the imagination.

In Gleim's eyes, this contest was a holy war, a crusade against the insolence and rapacity of the French and the preposterous pretensions, as he terms them of Maria Theresa. He was naturally proud of the effect produced by his compositions on the public mind. "Our soldiers sing my lays, instead of the worthless and immoral songs they were in the habit of singing during their marches. Can you blame the old man for seeking, however feebly, to aid in this great effort to force the enemy to conclude a peace."

---

(1) Geyer's Geschichte der neueren deutschen Literatur. Vol. 1st.

He often expressed the wish that he could handle a musket, and peril life and limb for the sake of that cause he held so dear.

In addition to the Kriegslieder, Gleim essayed all sorts and kinds of composition, drinking songs, love songs, rhymed and unryhmed, romances, and one poem of considerable length, called Halladat, or the Red Book, which excited much attention in its time, but is now forgotten. The following little poem is not devoid of simple pathos and melody.

For whom hast thou created  
O Lord, this world so bright?  
For whom are bud and blossom  
In the glen and on the height?

For whom the golden cornfield  
Where our glad footsteps rove?  
For whom do yonder sunbeams gild  
The meadow and the grove?

For whom are hills and valley  
So lovely every where?  
For whom do cooling zephyrs blow?  
For whom is all so fair?

The blessings that surround us  
Should be a call of love,  
To raise with each returning morn,  
Our thoughts to Him above.

Not vainly dost thou give us this,  
A heart to feel and love,  
A foretaste of the purer bliss  
Which shall be our's above.

But it is as a man and a Christian that Gleim's name will long be remembered with respect and gratitude, when as a poet it has sunk into oblivion. The friend of the poor and the afflicted, his hand and heart were ever open to the claims of suffering humanity. His means were far from ample; yet by self sacrifice and economy he contrived to effect an amount of good which would have been astonishing even in one far more richly endowed by fortune. Like all who strive to benefit mankind, he not unfrequently met with the foulest ingratitude; but nothing could weary his generous heart. "As long as I can pay for a meal", wrote the noble-minded old man, "none of my friends shall want", and he was true to his word. Though passionately attached to the cause of freedom, the French revolution, the commencement of which he lived to behold, never inspired him with sympathy or enthusiasm. He was either too experienced or too truly philosophical to be carried away by high-sounding phrases of fraternity and equality. Even, as early as November 1791, he foresaw and predicted those lamentable results which were soon to follow the brief dawn of freedom. "I value the rights of men," he was wont to say, "but only when united with their duties; freedom can never flourish on a blood-stained soil". The great wish of his heart was to draw all the first men in Germany to Halberstadt. "He dreamed", observes Gezler, "of forming there a complete German academy" and, if his wish was not fulfilled, it was not for want of the most strenuous efforts on his part. Nor did he ever cease urging on the three kings of Prussia, under whose

reigns he lived, the duty of protecting and fostering national literature.

Had Gleim's wish been granted, had the Prussian monarchs really taken German poetry under their fostering care, it might indeed have arrived earlier at a certain degree of polish and perfection, but would probably have never attained that lofty elevation of thought and fancy to which its own unaided efforts enabled it to soar. Gleim had predicted that the French, weary of anarchy, would themselves demand a ruler, and he lived to see his prophecy fulfilled. It was not till eighty winters had silvered his locks that he passed to the grave, beloved and lamented by all. (1)

---

(1) Leben von Gleim von G. Görte. Halberstadt 1811. Knobels Nachlaß. p. 90.

(2) Gleim's Briefe an Klopstock herausg. 1856.

## CHAPTER III.

HENRY EWALD KLEIST. — GELLERT. — GEßNER. — UZ.

AMONG Gleim's numerous friends was one whose productions, although not stamped by the hand of creative genius still display qualities which vindicate his claim to the title of a poet, and whose death for king and fatherland has endeared his name to his countrymen, Henry Ewald Kleist.

He was born at Zeblin in Pomerania the 7<sup>th</sup> March 1715. His father, a man of some property, resided on his own estates, and Kleist passed his childhood beneath the parental roof. Though somewhat wild and ungovernable, he was loved by all around him for his kindness and warmth of heart. In his tenth year he was sent to the Jesuit's college at Ceric, in Poland, where he seems to have distinguished himself for nothing save his love of fighting. His father, dissatisfied with his progress, removed him to the Gymnasium at Dantzic, where his natural talents began, though slowly, to develope themselves, while his adventurous spirit and dauntless courage rendered him an object of mingled respect and fear

among his comrades. In 1731 he entered the university of Königsberg with the firm determination to make up by assiduity for lost time. He was a constant attendant on all the lectures of physic, mathematics and chemistry, and soon outstripped many of his competitors who had commenced their studies under more favourable auspices. On leaving the university, Kleist returned for awhile to the paternal mansion, full of hope and confidence in the future. These bright visions were soon to be dispelled. No career seemed open for him in his native land. His mother had many influential relations in Denmark and thither he was sent, in the hope that they would forward his prospects in life. But either the will or the power was wanting, and Kleist was coolly informed that all they could do for him was to procure his admission into the Danish army. This by no means answered either his father's expectations or his own; for, despite his fiery spirit, the young man, probably from dislike to any species of control, was decidedly averse to the military career. The hope of winning fame and fortune, however, overcame his reluctance, and his father yielding, he entered the Danish service in 1736.

It was while quartered near Dantzig, that he first beheld the woman who was destined to exercise an influence so deep and lasting on his heart. Young, lovely and gifted, Wilhelmina von Goetz became almost at first sight the absolute mistress of his destiny. She seems to have returned his passion, though not with equal ardour. But Kleist's position and fortune were too precarious to please the fair one's prudent

and ambitious mother who, though she did not absolutely forbid the union, insisted, perhaps wisely, on its indefinite postponement. With a heavy heart, the youth tore himself from his beloved, uncertain when he should again behold her, or whether she would ever be his own.

In 1740, Kleist was destined to change the scene of his military duties. He was claimed by Frederick the Great as a native of Pomerania and, not unwillingly, resigned the Danish service for that of the Prussian hero. Appointed lieutenant in Prince Henry's regiment, he flattered himself that his personal advantages and mental attainments would gain him the royal favour, but in this he was cruelly disappointed. Frederick does not seem to have distinguished him in any way from his comrades. Meanwhile, with the thoughtlessness of youth, he indulged somewhat freely in all the pleasures and dissipations which Potsdam afforded, and, as he never reckoned the state of his finances, he too frequently found his purse exhausted ere he was in the slightest degree aware of it. In consequence, he was compelled to seek relief by borrowing at a ruinously high rate of interest. So long, however, as his credit was good and his creditors did not torment him, this gave him little concern. Full of hope and confidence, he expected each day a promotion which would enable him to discharge all his obligations. These dreams were soon to yield to stern reality; Kleist found his existence daily more and more wearisome. His talents, far from gaining the respect or friendship of his brother officers, only made him an object of dislike and

envy, while their manners marked by the rudeness, then the characteristic of the Prussian military, were insufferable to his sensitive and delicate temperament. Frequent contentions arose, one of which ended in a duel. Kleist was severely wounded and lay for many weeks on a bed of sickness. The surgeon who attended him, struck by his graceful mien and intellectual superiority, spoke of him in terms of eulogy to Gleim who was one of his intimate friends. With his usual benevolence, the good man hastened to the sufferer, to offer him aid and sympathy. He found him in bed, the commentaries of Cæsar at his side. He complained of inability to read long together, and his visitor offered his services which were gratefully accepted. Gleim selected one of his own poems on death, apparently rather a lugubrious subject. But some idea, more ludicrous probably than poetic, so amused the sufferer, that he burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, which reopened his wounds. Forgetting the affront to his muse in his terror for the patient's safety, Gleim flew to summon the medical attendant who calmed his fears by the assurance that the loss of blood would be beneficial rather than the contrary. So it proved and Kleist rapidly recovered. To his new friend the youth confided the passion which neither time nor suffering could diminish. It was about this period that he wrote the following verses breathing all the tenderness which filled his soul.

## TO WILHELMINA.

Now rosy spring adorns the meads and bowers;  
 The heav'ns reflect their azure in the rill:  
 The shepherd hails the perfumes of the flowers;  
 His fleecy charge sport on the grassy hill;  
 The snow has melted from the earth away  
 And dew-drops glisten on the bud and spray.

Here sleeps the herdsman in the dewy vale,  
 His head is pillow'd on his maiden's breast;  
 And with its song, the gentle nightingale  
 Warbles the young and happy pair to rest;  
 All in reviving nature bear their part,  
 But joy revisits not this aching heart.

. . . . .

At times I feel I am no mate for thee;  
 I scarcely dare to claim thee for mine own.  
 In thee th' Almighty's master-piece we see;  
 Thy mind, thy beauty would adorn a throne;  
 And peers and princes, 'mid their pomp and pride,  
 Might still rejoice to win thee as their bride.

But those with power and rank exalted high,  
 Are oft devoid of honour, truth and love.  
 I may have nothing to delight the eye;  
 But mine, a soul all mean disguise above,  
 A heart that knows full well to prize thy worth,  
 A heart that loves thee more than all on earth.

. . . . .

Amid the flash of swords, the battle's rage,  
 Near the stern battery — 'mid the blood-stained throng,  
 Where foes with foes a fearful conflict wage,  
 There will I seek the death for which I long.  
 Then, with a sigh thy gentle breast may swell,  
 For him who died because he loved too well.

All this devoted tenderness, this unswerving fidelity, were destined to be ill-repaid. His Wilhelmina, whose image had been ever present to his mind, even amid the brief dissipation of youth, on whom he had lavished the treasures of his warm and enthusiastic heart, was false to her plighted vow. For several months all intercourse between the lovers had been interrupted. Wilhelmina's mother had found means to prevent Kleist's letters from reaching their destination. Unable to resist the will of her fond but despotic parent, and perhaps persuaded she was forgotten, the maiden became the bride of another. A few cold and hurried lines from Madame de Gœtz told the fond lover that his hopes of earthly bliss were for ever blighted. At the same moment, Gleim was compelled to leave Potsdam and the unhappy young man found himself at once bereaved of love and friendship, utterly forsaken and desolate. Grief and disappointment for a time completely overwhelmed him; he fled from all society and his pallid cheek and altered mien betrayed but too plainly the depth of his anguish. Wilhelmina had been his first and only love and, in losing her, he felt as though he had lost all that was precious on earth. But time brought healing on its wings; the letters of Gleim, so full of tender sympathy and manly exhortations, were balm to his broken spirit. Gradually, though slowly, he recovered composure and, once more mingled with his fellow-men. The blow, indeed, had for ever crushed the gay and joyous spirit which had borne him so lightly over the waves of life. But it had likewise awakened reflections to which he had

hitherto been a stranger. It made him a better though a sadder man. He sought for consolation where alone it is to be found, and did not seek in vain.

Circumstances likewise combined to rouse him from the depths of melancholy into which he had fallen. Stirring times were at hand. Charles VI, Emperor of Germany, was no more. The moment appeared favourable to break down the supremacy of the house of Habsburg, to despoil it not only of the imperial crown, but of its entire inheritance. Frederick the Second found himself at the head of a magnificent army. He was young, ambitious, burning to elevate his kingdom to the first rank amid European nations and to win a glorious name in history. He had, or believed he had claims on Silesia, where his ancestors had of yore possessed sundry principalities. The temptation was too great to be resisted.

Frederick made his preparations with his wonted silence and rapidity and, almost before Austria had begun to perceive her danger, he had declared war against her and fallen like a thunderbolt on the devoted province. Kleist was sincerely attached to his royal master, little as he had been honoured by his notice. In his enthusiastic admiration for the hero, he was blind to the faults of the man. Throughout the campaign, his former cheerfulness seemed restored, but when, on its triumphant conclusion in 1742, he returned to Potsdam, he sank once more into deep depression. During the two years which elapsed between the first and second Silesian war, Kleist's life was unmarked by any particular incident. In 1744 he was again called to active service and marched with the

Prussian army to Bohemia. On the surrender of Prague he was compelled to remain with the garrison which Frederick left there. When the city was abandoned by the Prussians in their turn, he lost all his baggage in the confusion of the retreat, received a severe wound and was forced to march without intermission, and almost without food, for six days and nights. Exhausted at length with fatigue and suffering, he halted at the little town of Berg, where the blunder of an unskilful surgeon nearly cost him his life. He recovered after a long and painful illness; but it was a twelvemonth ere he was able to return to Potsdam. From this period dates the long and intimate correspondence with Gleim, in which the patriotic feelings and high aspirations of the poet and warrior are so touchingly blended with the warm affections of the friend.

“Potsdam, February 3<sup>d</sup> 1746.

I have just arrived here, and you threaten to leave it for good and all. I sent you a letter six weeks ago, in which I inclosed some poetical specimens and I should be very much annoyed if this letter were broken open and read; for among officers, it is a kind of disgrace to be a poet. You flatter me with hopes of promotion; but of that there seems no chance; the king dislikes the regiment on account of the many desertions &c.”

It will be seen from this letter, how little literature was respected or cultivated in the Prussian camp, and how uncongenial such an atmosphere must have been to a mind like Kleist's. The position in which he found himself, indeed, was in every respect

repugnant to his nature. The visions of fame and fortune which had brightened the first years of his military career, had long been dissipated for ever. The severe and wearisome discipline to which both officers and soldiers were subjected, the coarse manners and uncultivated understandings of his comrades, became every day more and more intolerable. Conscious of talents which, if fair play had been granted them, would have fitted him for a far higher sphere of action, his spirit wore itself away in vain and perpetual longings, in hopeless regrets and passionate aspirations. The state of his health, likewise, affected his mental condition; he had never entirely recovered the blow inflicted by the faithlessness of his early love, nor, despite the many temptations that presented themselves, did he yield a second time to the tender passion.

At length the royal favour so long vainly expected deigned to smile on him. "The king", he writes to Gleim in 1748, "was pleased yesterday to raise me to the rank of major and, to-day I was his guest." This gleam of good fortune cheered Kleist's drooping spirits. While he performed, with unwearyed assiduity, the duties which fell to his share, he devoted every leisure moment to the cultivation of his poetic powers, and, in 1749, completed his "Spring", a descriptive poem, the most important but not the best of his productions. "It was received," says Vilmar, <sup>(1)</sup> "with the warmest approbation and, though a little tainted by the prevailing love of shepherds and

---

<sup>(1)</sup> Vilmar's Geschichte der deutschen Literatur. Vol. 2d. p. 139.

shepherdesses, was infinitely freer from bad taste than most productions of that period". The "Spring" indeed, despite its want of human interest, and occasional lengthiness of detail, has redeeming merits of no mean order, grace of imagery, depth of feeling and truth of colouring. Had Kleist been capable of greater perseverance, had he learned to concentrate his powers, he might have attained a high place in the literary annals of his country. His sketches are always admirable, but he shrank from the exertion and fatigue of filling them up. New ideas were perpetually presenting themselves which, like the former ones, were eagerly seized, but, ere thoroughly worked out, were in their turn thrown aside and forgotten. His over-desire for success, his nervous dread of criticism shackled and constrained even his happiest efforts. It was perhaps on this account, more than from want of genius, that he never attained that excellence which some portions of his poems seemed to promise.

The "Spring" and a few minor pieces which appeared at the same time raised Kleist to a high position in that literary world just beginning to develope itself in Germany. Frederick, indeed, did not honour him with much attention; but his brother Prince Henry frequently sent for him, conversed with him long together and expressed great admiration for his literary powers.

The shrill blast of the trumpet roused Kleist from his dreams of pastoral repose. The seven years' war had broken out, and Germany was again the scene of strife and carnage. On the one side, stood the fair

and haughty Maria Theresa, burning to regain Silesia, the voluptuous Elizabeth of Russia, Louis the 15<sup>th</sup>, or rather Madame de Pompadour. Frederick had nothing but his own genius to rely on; for England had not yet declared on his side. Yet the first campaign was crowned with success. "Our departure from Potsdam" writes Kleist to Gleim "was so sudden that I had no time to take leave either of you or my other friends. We have occupied all Saxony with our troops. The Saxons fled whenever we approached and have assembled here at Pyrna, where they have entrenched themselves to the teeth, to the number of 1400, so that they cannot receive the slightest aid, and must evidently surrender in a few days as prisoners of war. This active life pleases me well; I am better and more cheerful than ever, though I weep sometimes with the poor famished peasants, whose corn I am obliged to take for my horses and, I am sure, I feel their sorrows as much as they do themselves. The king has seized the archives at Dresden; a certain Major von Wangenheim had the order to convey them to Berlin. The Queen of Poland placed herself at the door of the chamber and seemed resolved to prevent their being touched; the major appealed to his orders; the queen replied, that they who carried off her papers must carry her off likewise. After having stood, however, about two hours, the major erect and silent before her, she gave way and the papers were removed."

Perchance our readers may be less inclined than Kleist to admire this and sundry other parts of Fre-

derick's conduct; but his dauntless heroism and brilliant exploits dazzled the ardent soldier.

His correspondence with Gleim continued uninterrupted. "You tell me," he writes, "that you shudder at the thought of learning I am dead, or wounded. You must however prepare yourself for the idea. If the event really happen (though I do not think it will, for in certain cases I have a great deal of good or ill fortune, I know not which to call it), you shall read the news in my own hand. I will write to you before the action and command my servant, if I remain on the field, to put it in the post, but not otherwise. The letter will begin thus: "When you receive this I shall be no more." There is certainly something rather amusing in a man announcing his own demise; but I fancy nothing of the sort will happen. However, if it did, it would be well for me; I should be far happier than if I survived you: I often rejoice in the thought of death as a sailor rejoices at the sight of a peaceful harbour after being long tossed about by storms and tempests." "I am again well," he writes a little while later, "and find my desire to die proportionably diminished. You must not pay attention to all my complaints; they arise frequently from the state of my health and my melancholy temperament. My promotion has not yet appeared; I wrote on the subject to Prince Henry who replied he had spoken about it to the king; but, from his answer, he gathered that a change is to take place in the regiment. Perhaps I shall be removed, and that will not much grieve me; as the prince is no longer well inclined towards me; but I have the satis-

faction of feeling that the army would not willingly lose my services, and that lightens the annoyance I should otherwise endure on the occasion."

In the midst of his military avocations, Kleist still found time for occasional poetical compositions. "I rejoice", he writes to Gleim, "that the trifles I send please you. I only fear, as age comes on me, that my fire will be extinguished without my perceiving it. As soon as you observe this, pray, tell me, and I will never write another line." Whether Kleist would really have had the self-command to fulfil this promise was never put to the test; but if so, he would have been wiser than most authors, from the days of the archbishop of Granada downwards.

Kleist's letters alternate between details as to his literary productions and accounts of the stirring events in which he was an actor. "I would have given you information of our glorious victory at Weissenfels," he writes Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> 1767, "had I not been sent on with the wounded from Merseburg. Lessing greets you: he says the grenadier might for once sing him a merry song." "We have conquered, my beloved friend," he again writes. "The Prince of Bevern, with twenty thousand men, has completely beaten the Austrians with thirty nine thousand. Now all will go well. Heaven protects the just cause; but I am disconsolate that I must remain here. If I do not attain something good in the course of this war, I will give in my resignations the moment it is over." "My prayer is heard", he adds a day or two later, "I join the corps of Prince Henry, and I feel as if I were in heaven! I am now satisfied with the change that removed me from Potsdam

and brought me hither. I do not think I shall fall, but it is possible; in this case give the two hundred thalers to Rammel and to Lessing, half to each, or rather give it them directly; if I live, they can repay me when they are rich. Yes! give it them directly" he adds with generous warmth, "I shall have enough with what remains viz: a thousand thalers and my little plot of ground. If I die, send the money to my sister, and may God bless and protect you all."

In this letter he enclosed the following hymn long a favourite with the Prussian soldiers.

#### HYMN ON THE MARCH TO HOFF.

Great is the Lord! the heavens proclaim afar  
 His power; they are his seat;  
 The raging storm is His triumphal car,  
 His steed — the light'ning fleet!

The hues of morn are a reflection dim  
 Of his resplendent might;  
 The sun itself is but a spark of Him,  
 The source of light and life.

He smiles, and nature decks the verdant earth  
 With beauty and with bloom:  
 He frowns, and tempests rush impetuous forth  
 In darkness and in gloom.

Praise ye the Lord! Praise ye his holy name,  
 Ye who obey his nod.  
 Ye starry host, his mighty power proclaim.  
 Earth celebrate thy God.

Thou foaming ocean in thy stormy bed,  
 Tremble before his frown.  
 Bend, lofty cedar, bend thy stately head.  
 Forests and woods bow down.

Ye, savage monsters in your rocky den,  
Adore your Maker's power;  
Sing him, ye little warblers of the glen,  
In grove and hill and bower.

Echo! exalt his name! in earth and heaven  
Be that great name adored.  
And thou, oh man! to whom this world is given,  
Worship and bless thy Lord!

The pure and lofty religious feeling, the grave and simple pathos which breathe in every line of this little composition made it at once popular, more especially among the soldiery, who sang it enthusiastically on their march, with that intuitive sense of the good and beautiful which is so often found in those least acquainted with the rules of art. Gleim received it with rapture. "I owe it", said Kleist, in reply to his affectionate praises, "to my soldiers. They always sing hymns on their morning march, before commencing the melodies of the king of Prussia. One morning they sang one in which occurs the passage "What endless grace our God bestows". These words touched me, and, riding forwards, the little hymn I have sent you presented itself almost spontaneously to my mind". "I am still here", he writes the 27<sup>th</sup> of April, waiting orders to march. The prince said he should need me in the campaign, and then observed very graciously that he hoped soon to see me completely restored to health".

The prospect of at length acquiring name and fame in the career to which the greater part of his life had been devoted, inspired Kleist with youthful

energy. In the campaigns of 1756, 57 and 58 with their varying fortunes, in the defeat at Collin, the triumph of Rossbach, he bore a not inglorious, if not a very prominent part, and even found, at times, opportunities of displaying both skill and courage of no common order. On one occasion, when the Austrians with a force of eighty thousand men, surprised the Prussian army infinitely inferior in numbers, Kleist at the head of his batallion, defended a narrow defile, by which their position was commanded, with such resolute valour that the enemy after repeated attacks retired. This gallant deed, which in all probability saved the whole army, was held of no account, Kleist writes, because the loss of the enemy was not considerable.

Meanwhile private sorrows fell fast upon him. A horde of Cossacks attacked the village in which resided an uncle to whom he was tenderly attached, murdering both him and his family, and at the same time the little estate, in which he had hoped to spend the evening of his life, was ravaged and destroyed by the same ruthless invaders.

But Kleist had no leisure to brood over these terrible events. His whole soul was engrossed by the mighty drama in which he was a humble actor. "Something decisive must occur this year", he writes in the beginning of May 1759, "Let me see Daun beaten once more and I shall die content". The wish was not destined to be fulfilled; but Kleist was ere long to meet the fate he had always so fervently desired, a soldier's death fighting for his native land.

The campaign of 1769 was fraught with disasters to Frederick; but no event was more calamitous than

the battle of Kunersdorf. On the morning of that fatal day, Kleist who had a foreboding of his approaching doom wrote the following hymn which was found among his papers.

## LAST HYMN.

The lust of conquest I will praise no more,  
Nor gold, nor treasures that so soon decay;  
My soul above all earthly dross shall soar;  
And heaven shall be the subject of my lay.

Devotion, in my very heart enshrined,  
Bears me aloft on swift and dauntless wings:  
I leave this world of guilt and gloom behind,  
And slake my thirst at purer, holier springs.

This globe adorned with many a glittering hue,  
Its empty vanities, its hollow might,  
Like some vain mist have vanished from my view,  
And heavenly radiance bursts upon my sight.

What mortal eye shall dare behold unveiled  
The splendour that surrounds th' Almighty throne!  
Before whose glance, the heavens themselves have quailed,  
Filled with his presence and with that alone.

Only unto the angelic host 'tis given  
Meetly the praises of their God to sing;  
Their pure and joyous strain resounds through heaven,  
The song is hushed — and heaven bows down before its king.

The religious fervour breathed in these lines, was no affected sentiment; it was the outpouring of a deep and pious emotion which the secret presentiment of death exalted to enthusiasm.

To follow the details of the battle does not enter into the scope of our biography; suffice it to say that Kleist, after giving proof of the most fearless courage, and making many gallant charges at the head of his regiment, received a wound in the right hand which compelled him to drop his sword. Grasping it in the left, he cheered on his men amid a tremendous cannonade, when a musket shot struck his left arm likewise which fell powerless to his side. Seizing his sword with his teeth, he rushed onward, glowing with heroic ardour, and was but thirty paces from the last battery when another shot shattered his leg and threw him from his saddle; he endeavoured to remount his horse, but in vain. Pale and helpless, he sank to the ground, exclaiming "Children do not forsake your father". At that moment a regiment arrived to the aid of his almost exhausted troops. Kleist uttered a faint sigh of joy, and fell back senseless in the arms of two of his men who carried him to the rear. The surgeon was engaged in binding up his wounds, when a bullet laid him a corpse beside his bleeding charge. An instant afterwards a band of Cossack light horsemen arriving like a swarm of hornets, rushed on the unhappy Kleist and stripped him to his shirt. As, however, he spoke Polish, they imagined him a Pole and therefore spared his life. Flinging him on a heap of rubbish they left him to his fate and hastened to seek fresh spoil. Night came on, and Kleist exhausted with loss of blood sank into a troubled sleep from which he was aroused by the arrival of some Russian hussars; touched by

his condition, they lighted a fire to warm his benumbed limbs, bound up his wounds as best they could, administered brandy and water, and clothed him with their own garments. But their aid was of little avail. All soon became the prey of a new troop of greedy Cossacks who left the sufferer with nothing but the straw on which the more charitable hussars had laid him. Here he remained in the most excruciating sufferings till early the following morning, when, perceiving a Russian officer approaching, he called him, informed him of his name and rank, and claimed his assistance and compassion. By the officer's command, he was instantly placed in a baggage waggon and conveyed to Frankfort on the Oder where, for the first time, his wounds were properly dressed. It was too late. The loss of blood, the exposure to the night air, the want of food and raiment acted fatally on a constitution never strong. All that skill and kindness could effect was done. Professor Nicolai obtained permission to remove him to his own abode and watched himself day and night by his bedside, but in vain. His strength gradually failed, and on the night of the 24<sup>th</sup> he breathed his last in the arms of his friend.

The generous care of the Professor did not terminate with the life of Kleist. He himself followed him to the grave, accompanied by all the Russian and Austrian military authorities then at Frankfort. When the coffin was about to be lowered, it was perceived that the sword was wanting. The same officer who had conveyed Kleist from the field of Kunersdorf, loosened his own, and laid it on the bier of his gallant foe. Thus, amid universal tokens of respect and

sorrow, was the hero and the poet borne to his last abode. (1)

Almost contemporary with Kleist was the well known Christopher Fürchtgott Gellert. The merits of Gellert, in a poetic point of view, are so small that the celebrity he enjoyed not only during his life, but for a considerable period after his decease, appears at first sight utterly unaccountable. The fact, however, is not the less true, and is significant of the low standard of literary taste in Germany at that period. It may be ascribed partly to the respect inspired by his pure and generous nature, and partly to the clear, earnest, kindly tone and sober sense which pervades his productions, and which fitted them for that class, so large in every country, but more particularly in that to which Gellert belonged, to whom poetry of a more lofty order was then a sealed book. His most ardent desire was to adopt the clerical profession, and, as he himself observes, though he might not have conferred any great honour on the church, he would certainly not have disgraced it; but his straightened means not permitting him to continue his theological studies, he accepted the post of tutor to two young men of noble birth residing near Dresden, where he passed some of the happiest years of his life. "After my day's work", he says, "I used to refresh myself with a glass of wine and a bit of bread, and shed tears of gratitude at my lot". Circumstances, however, which none of his biographers clearly explain, compelled him to relinquish his situation and

---

(1) Leben von Kleist von Corte. Leipzig 1773.

he determined to support himself henceforward by copying, translating and writing articles for newspapers and occasionally delivering lectures. At the same time his poetical talent, which had hitherto lain dormant, began to develope itself and he produced the first volume of his fables which were received with a rapturous applause for which the author himself was not prepared. The purity and simplicity of the language, the excellence of the moral the absence of all borrowed French phrases, has given them a lasting popularity to which, in a poetical point of view, they are certainly not entitled; for in grace, wit, humour and wealth of imagination they are utterly wanting.

Encouraged by success, Gellert published a variety of romances, comedies, &c. all of which are beneath mediocrity. Had his fame depended on these, he would soon have been forgotten. But in the year 1754 inspired by an earnest wish to exalt the glory of that God whom he so sincerely loved, he produced those hymns which, to use the words of a modern critic, (<sup>1</sup>) have rendered him, in a great degree, the religious teacher of his countrymen. Amid all the changes of literary taste during the last half century, they have still maintained their place in public favour; the hymn, "On God not on my council" is still a universal favourite, and the Christmas lay "This is the day that God has seen" resounds from many an infant lip on that joyous and hallowed morn. "Never, since the golden days of

---

(<sup>1</sup>) Gehler, neuere deutsche National-Literatur. Vol. 1st.

true old church hymns", observes Doctor Gezler, "has sacred poetry taken such deep root and obtained such lasting popularity in Germany". He never composed but when in a calm and cheerful mood and, before writing, always knelt down to implore the divine blessing. The following translations may enable our readers to form a judgement as to the merit of these hymns, though they lose something when rendered in a foreign tongue.



### PRAISE TO THE CREATOR.

Creator! when I see thy might,  
Thy wisdom and the love,  
For ever watching, day and night,  
O'er all below, above,  
Melted with gratitude and praise,  
I know not how my voice to raise,  
My father and my God!

Where'er I turn, my dazzled eye  
Beholds thy wonders still;  
The glorious heavens, the azure sky  
Adore their Maker's skill.  
Who bids the sun so brightly shine?  
Clothed in his majesty divine  
Who calls the starry host?

Who rules the winds and sends them forth?  
Who bids descend the rain?  
Who opes the fruitful womb of earth  
To deck the field and plain?  
Oh! Lord of wonder and of might,  
Far as the clouds extend their flight  
Thy mercy too extends!

And man selected from the crowd  
By thine almighty hand,  
Alone with intellect endow'd  
Thy works to understand;  
Man of creation crown and pride,  
He is a daily proof beside  
Of all thy wondrous grace.

Exalt, my soul, his holy word,  
Again and still again!  
Praise to our Father and our Lord!  
Let all lips cry Amen!  
Let all their king and God adore  
And love and serve him evermore.  
Who would not serve their God?

### THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

How great the goodness of the Lord!  
Is there a heart, it does not move,  
Who with souls steeled against his word,  
Melts not in gratitude and love.  
Ah! me; whatever he allot me  
To praise him be my grateful part;  
The Lord hath never yet forgot me;  
Forget not thou, the Lord, my heart!

Who all my footsteps hath protected?  
That God who hath no need of me  
Whose counsels I so oft rejected,  
Whose will so oft I sought to flee;  
Who soothes me, 'mid my hours of sadness?  
Who lends fresh courage at my call?  
Who grants me hope and peace and gladness  
Save that great pow'r who governs all?

And, say, shall I not love and fear him  
 Shall I requite him good with ill?  
 What shall he call and I not hear him,  
 And follow in his way and will?  
 His words are words that do not perish,  
 More precious far than worldly pelf.  
 God above all things must I cherish,  
 And love my neighbour as myself.

Oh! let that mercy which delights me,  
 Before my eyes for ever be;  
 Strengthen the impulse which excites me  
 To dedicate my life to thee!  
 Support me, Lord! 'mid doubt and error;  
 Console me with thy healing power,  
 And conquer in my heart the terror  
 Of the last dread and awful hour!

The extreme delicacy of Gellert's health greatly interfered with his labours. He endured his sufferings with cheerful resignation, fulfilling assiduously his duties of professor of literature in the university of Leipzig to which he was appointed in 1751. So great was his reputation, both as a poet and an individual, that it reached the ears of Frederick the Great who, during his brief residence at Dresden in 1757, summoned him to his presence.

Frederick's literary tastes were moulded on French models, and even, while directing all the force of his genius, all the power of his arms against France, she still continued, in his eyes, the type of literary excellence. This could not but exercise a deleterious influence on the opening literature of Germany; but, on the other hand, the glory with which he crowned

the arms of Prussia, shed a reflected lustre on all who bore the German name, elevating the people in their own eyes as well as in those of the rest of Europe, and thus arousing a loftier and more independent spirit than had hitherto pervaded them. The following description of the interview between the warrior king and the quiet and retiring poet may not be uninteresting. It exhibits in an amusing point of view the utter contempt with which Frederick regarded all the authors of his own nation, while the calm and gentle dignity with which Gellert replied to the scoffing observations of the monarch, exalts our opinion of the man who, despite his natural timidity, ventured to refute a conqueror and a king.

*Frederic.* Are you the professor Gellert?

*Gellert.* Yes, your Majesty —

*Fr.* Whence do you come?

*G.* From Hainigen near Trieberg.

*Fr.* Tell me why have you no good German authors? —

*Major Quintius Icilius.* (who had introduced Gellert rather embarrassed) Your Majesty sees one before you whom the French have translated and call the German Lafontaine.

*King.* (More courteously.) That is a great deal. Have you read Lafontaine?

*G.* Yes, Sire, but not copied. I am an original.

*K.* There is one then; but why have we not more good authors?

*G.* Your Majesty is prejudiced against the Germans.

*K.* No, no! that is not the case.

*G.* At least against German authors.

*K.* That may be true; but why have we no good historian?

*G.* We are not wanting even in that. We have a Mascof and a Cramer who has continued Bossuet —

K. How is it possible that a German should continue Bossuet?

G. Yes, and successfully; one of the most learned of your Majesty's professors has declared he has continued him with as much eloquence and more historical truth.

K. Does the man understand it?

G. The world thinks so.

K. But why does no one attempt Tacitus? That should be translated.

G. Tacitus is difficult to translate. Even the French translations are bad.

K. You are right.

G. Besides there are a variety of reasons why the Germans have not yet distinguished themselves in every branch of literature. When arts and science flourished among the Greeks, the Romans were engaged in war. Perhaps the present may be the warlike era of Germany; perhaps she may yet have an Augustus and a Louis the fourteenth.

K. There have been two Augustus, in Saxony.

G. Yes, and in Saxony we have made a good beginning.

K. How? would you have an Augustus for all Germany?

G. Not exactly; I only wish each sovereign would encourage the good genius in his own land.

K. Have you never left Saxony?

G. Yes, once I was at Berlin.

K. You should travel.

G. Your Majesty, for that I have neither health nor fortune.

K. These are bad times.

G. Yes. If your Majesty would give peace to Germany —

K. How is it possible? do you not know there are three against me.

G. I take more interest in ancient than modern history.

K. What is your opinion? Which is the finest, Homer or Virgil?

G. Sire, Homer appears to deserve the preference; he was the original.

*K.* But Virgil is far more polished.

*G.* We are too far removed from Homer to judge correctly of his language and manners. I trust to Quintilian he gives Homer the preference.

*K.* One must not be a slave to the opinions of the ancients.

*G.* That I am not, your Majesty. I follow them only when the length of time and distance prevents my judging for myself.

*Major Icilius.* Gellert has published a collection of German letters.

*K.* Indeed? Have you written in the style of Gottsched?

*G.* Yes, your Majesty.

*K.* But why do you not change it? it is abominable They bring me whole pages of which I do not understand a single word.

*G.* If your Majesty cannot alter it, I am still less able to do so; I can but counsel where you can command.

. . . . . ; . . . . .

At the monarch's request, Gellert repeated one of his fables the "Painter", to which Frederick listened with great attention. When he had finished: "Well", said the king, "that is really very good. You have something harmonious in your verse. I understand all that; but Gottsched read me a translation of the Iphigenia, and though I had the French before me I did not understand a word. If I remain here you must often come and bring me your fables with you and read me something new".

*G.* I do not know if I read well; I have a singing voice.

*K.* Yes, like the Silesians, but you must read your fables yourself or they lose much. Will you come?

Despite this invitation, the professor was not recalled to the royal presence. When he had departed, the king exclaimed, "That is quite another man from

Gottsched", and next day at table he observed: "C'est le plus raisonnable des savants Allemands".

Gellert was no less a favourite as a professor than as a poet. His lectures were frequently attended by more than four hundred students. Henry Prince of Prussia, after a friendly conversation presented him with the horse he had ridden on the field of Trieberg, and the General Hielsen excused his native village from quartering his troops on account, as he expressly stated, of the esteem and the admiration with which the poet had inspired him. The moral lectures, which appeared about a year before Gellert's death, had a most important influence on the German youth of that period. "On their delivery", says Goëthe, "the philosophical Oratorium was always full, and the pure and noble soul of this excellent man, the sympathy he evinced in our welfare, his warnings, his entreaties delivered in a somewhat sad and mournful tone, made a deep though, it must be confessed, not a very lasting impression on our minds".

In 1769, Gellert's health, long failing, gave signs of rapid decay, and, after much suffering endured with unalterable patience and serenity, he expired the 13<sup>th</sup> December 1769: "I am weak and cannot understand much" he said shortly before his death, "but utter the name of my Redeemer. When I hear that I feel fresh strength and joy."

Gellert's death was regarded as a national calamity. Seldom has the loss of any individual of a rank so humble excited so universal a regret. He was borne to the grave amid the tears and sobs of hundreds of friends and admirers who lamented equally the author

and the man. The pilgrimages to his tomb were so numerous that the authorities found themselves compelled to forbid them altogether on account of the crowds they attracted.<sup>(1)</sup>

Gellert's character was mild, gentle and unobtrusive. His temper sweet and even, his principles lofty, his devotion fervent and sincere. Ever ready to aid the unfortunate, his means were often taxed to the uttermost to relieve the distresses of those around him, and his heart was open to every high and generous feeling.

So deep, indeed, was the reverence for his memory that, as Dr. Villmar observes, it would have been for many years held high treason to utter a word to his disparagement. <sup>(2)</sup> Ere we express amazement at the celebrity his works enjoyed, let us remember that of certain writers in our own country, not so very superior in poetic powers to the German author, of Hayley, of Miss. Seward and of others whose names have long sank into oblivion. Gellert is often trivial and commonplace; but the hymns we have cited, though devoid of any high poetic merit, possess, as we see, a simple truth and fervour which touch the heart.

While Gellert's virtues and talents were thus elevating the standard of German literature, the town of Zürich gave birth to a man destined to exercise over its poetry an influence equally beneficial. The fame of Gessner, indeed, however little in accor-

---

(1) Leben von Gellert, von Cramer, Leipzig 1774 und Döring 1838.

(2) Villmar's Geschichte deutscher Literatur. Vol. 2d. p. 170.

dance with his real merits, was so widely diffused as to render some notice of his life and productions indispensable in any work treating of German poets and poetry. Gessner was born in 1738. One of his ancestors, Conrad, had distinguished himself in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the depth and extent of his learning, and is cited as the most unwearied scholar of the middle ages.<sup>(1)</sup> Gessner's childhood gave little promise of celebrity; he was regarded as a hopeless dunce. The method of instruction then usually adopted ill suited his active spirit, while his passionate love of nature rendered confinement intolerable. He found it impossible to fix his attention on the Latin grammar and rule of three, and amused himself with moulding figures of wax under the table. But a volume of Robinson Crusoe falling into his hands, gave a new impulse to his mind; he became passionately fond of reading; every leisure moment was devoted to the continuation of Robinson, altered and enlarged after his own fashion. Unluckily, these youthful effusions were discovered by the schoolmaster, a man of narrow-minded and inveterate prejudice who, instead of hailing them with delight as an indication of awakening intelligence, broke forth into violent indignation at such a waste of time, as he called it, and seizing the papers consigned them to the flames. Poor Gessner's feelings at the destruction of his cherished productions may be imagined; but neither this auto-da-fé, nor the chastisement accompanying it, deterred him from a pursuit which had become ne-

---

(1) Hallam's hist. of the literature of the middle ages.

cessary to his existence. He continued to compose in secret, though none of his youthful productions seem to have been of any great merit. Meanwhile his progress in the usual studies was so slow as to excite the anger of his masters and the despair of his parents. Hoping a favourable influence from a change of tuition, they placed him under the care of a clergyman in the neighbourhood of Lausanne who, by his amiable manners and admirable method, soon succeeded in inspiring his pupil, not indeed with any passionate love of classic lore, but at least with the desire of improvement.

His present place of residence, situated amongst some of the most beautiful scenery in Switzerland, afforded ample scope for his love of the picturesque. A new and tender passion which took possession of his soul, added fresh charms to the romantic landscapes around him. The rector's daughter, a maiden about his own age, was his daily companion and her budding beauty made a deep impression on his susceptible heart. This youthful affection, however, led to no lasting results; the lovers parted and met no more without either suffering much from the separation.

After two years residence at Berg, Gessner returned to the parental roof and was shortly after apprenticed to a bookseller at Berlin. At first this pleased him well enough; but ere long he began to find the necessary confinement and every day duties of his new employment extremely wearisome. Compelled to spend day after day in packing, arranging and sorting books, instead of reading them, he saw all his bright prospects fading away, and, finally in a

fit of despair unceremoniously took leave of his employer, hired a room, and for awhile gave himself up to all the amusements that Berlin afforded. His parents, as may be supposed, were highly indignant at his conduct and, to bring him to a sense of his folly, absolutely refused him any further supplies. The pride of the youth was piqued rather than subdued by this measure. Though, at heart, he sincerely repented his hasty step and longed for a reconciliation, he resolved to suffer the extremity of distress rather than purchase forgiveness by concessions he deemed humiliating. He had always loved painting and had displayed considerable talent as a draughtsman. He now felt convinced that, by devoting his whole attention to this art, he should be able to gain at least sufficient to supply his daily wants. Shutting himself up in his chamber, he toiled unremittingly for several weeks, allowing himself only sufficient rest and food to support nature. At length one day he presented himself to Hempel, an artist then celebrated for his skill at Zürich, and entreated him to accompany him to his lodgings. Hempel consented. Great was his astonishment, on perceiving the wall covered with freshly painted landscapes and hearing Gessner, with much emotion, entreat his candid opinion whether he considered that he possessed sufficient talent, not only to gain his livelihood, but to attain distinction as an artist. Hempel examined the paintings long and silently and burst into a loud laugh, on hearing Gessner complain that "the colours would not dry." He had mixed them, it appears, not with linseed, but with olive oil: "I see", said the ar-

tist, "that you have not studied long; but of what is not a beginner capable, who knows so little and yet does so much!"

Thus encouraged, the youth pursued his new vocation with a fixity of purpose of which few had hitherto deemed him capable. Touched by his patience and persevering energy, his parents relented, and not only forgave the past, but granted their consent to his continuing the profession he had adopted.

All now seemed to smile on Gessner. Every day he made new progress in his beloved art. But though the greater part of his time was devoted to painting, his taste for poetry had not suffered any diminution: gradually as the pressure of absolute necessity decreased, this love resumed all its former empire. Conscious, however, that his naturally defective ear would render it almost impossible for him to compose in rhythmical measure, he determined on adopting a species of poetic prose to which he trusted to lend a harmony which would, in some measure at least, supply the place of verse. Undoubtedly Gessner cannot be blamed for following that path which he felt the surest and safest. But, in truth, the absence of metre destroys half the charm of his composition. It is only the most thrilling and rapid narration, the loftiest epic poetry that can dispense with the witchery which verse sheds over even common productions, lending them a spell independent of the thoughts and images they embody. The songs of shepherds and shepherdesses cannot be expected to possess any high degree of eloquence and, divested of the graces of versification, too frequently become utterly wearisome.

The desire for change of scene drew Gessner for awhile from both painting and poetry. With a few Louis d'or in his pocket, the fruit of his labours as an artist, he set out for Berlin and, after visiting all that was worth seeing there, proceeded to Hanover. Here he had letters of introduction to professor Rammier. But resolved, if possible, to win his friendship by his own merits rather than by the recommendation of others, he repaired to a coffee-house frequented by the aged poet and there, seizing an opportunity of addressing him, he speedily so ingratiated himself into his favour that he expressed a desire to learn the name of so amiable a young man. The letter was then delivered, and the friendship thus commenced ended only with the life of the elder poet.

On his return to his native town, Gessner met with rather an amusing adventure. While at Berlin, he had made the acquaintance of a young man, full of wit and humour, but of whose name he was ignorant. This was no other than Dancourt, the harlequin of the French theatre at Berlin. The separation had been equally painful to both, but neither entertained the slightest hope of ever meeting again. Fortune had determined otherwise. On his way through Berlin, Gessner visited the theatre where a pantomime was being performed. On the Harlequin appearing, he went behind the scenes and advanced a few steps forward to have a better view of him. No sooner did Harlequin perceive him, than rushing towards him and flinging his arms round his neck, he exclaimed joyously: "oh vous voilà, mon cher Gessner, comment cela va-t-il?" Gessner,

though rather embarrassed at so unexpected a salutation in so public a place, submitted with as good a grace as he could command, and returned the embrace amid the unrestrained laughter of the spectators.<sup>(1)</sup>

Gesner returned from his travels, with taste refined and talents ripened, to pursue his literary and artistic career. The revolution in German literature effected by Bodmar and his school had just commenced. Gessner took no active part in the conflict; but it was not without its influence on his own mind. Meanwhile stimulated by the approbation of Ramler, he published a poem "the Swiss Mountaineer to his armed maiden" which, however, met with as little success as it deserved. But Gessner was not discouraged and, in 1735, he produced an Idyl in poetic prose, called Daphne which, despite its insufferable tediousness and languor, excited considerable attention. Incle and Yarico, though founded on an Indian tale of considerable interest, was less successful. But this failure was forgotten in the rapturous applause with which his Idyls were hailed and which, on perusing the work in the present day, seems almost incredible. Nor was this admiration confined to his native land. In France, where German literature had hitherto been unnoticed or despised, their success was no less flattering than startling. The minister, who was then engaged in the study of German, commenced a translation.<sup>(2)</sup> It was completed by Monsr. Huber, and obtained wide and

---

(1) Leben von Geßner, von Hottinger. Zürich 1796.

(2) Gezler's neuere deutsche National-Geschichte.

instant popularity. (1). The grace of style, the melody of language, the vivid delineations of a pure and innocent existence, so strongly in contrast with the stiff etiquette and cold observances of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, rendered these Idyls universal favourites and more than counterbalanced their many defects. It was a transition period. The human mind had begun to emancipate itself from the prejudices and restraints which had hitherto pressed so heavily and yet, in a certain degree, so salutarily upon it. It was preparing for that tremendous change which was to lead to so much anarchy and bloodshed, indeed, but at the same time to pave the way for reforms so important and lasting. People were weary of the stiff manners, the antiquated ceremonies of their ancestors, even as they were weary of their hoops, fans, pomatum and pigtails. They gladly averted their eyes from reality, from the present with its cares and anxieties, from the future with its doubts and fears, to the ideal world which Gessner opened to their view. It was a relief to exchange, for a moment at least, the deceitful court, the heated saloon for the cool grot, the bowery wood, the crystal fountain; to turn from worthless kings and insolent minions, to devoted swains and graceful shepherdesses; from the falsehood, treachery and deceit of real life to the truth, love and devotion of that golden age the poet depicted. The tone of overwrought tenderness, of exaggerated sensibility which, at another period, would have excited ridicule,

---

(1) Huber's works. Tub. 1807.

now touched and melted every heart. It was as refreshing for the wearied votary of pomp and pleasure to turn to this calm, sweet though vapid picture of rural delight and untainted purity, as for the Beau, tired with ball and rout, to throw off his rich costume and assume the dressing gown and slippers.

But Gessner's groups, though charming enough, are not living beings. They are too pure, too sinless and, above all, too happy to excite interest or sympathy; nay, could such a state of things be realized, we should find it intolerably wearisome. For what virtue, however transcendent, what beauty, however enchanting, could suffice to render existence agreeable passed only in tending sheep, playing on a reed or chanting vows of love and fidelity? Besides we need scarcely remark how utterly this sort of existence is incompatible with the delicate loveliness, the snowy brows and lily arms of the fair shepherdesses, though, as the scene of these Idyls lies under the sky of Greece, not of Germany, this objection, it may be said, does not apply with equal force. But who would not rather welcome the most incessant care and appalling dangers, than an existence so utterly devoid of every higher aim and end, of all that can elevate the soul or the intellect.

“Gessner”, observes Gezler, (<sup>1</sup>) “like Rousseau, would have gladly sacrificed all the privileges of knowledge, science, art and civilization, could he have restored human nature to its imaginary pristine purity.”

---

(<sup>1</sup>) Geschichte der neueren deutschen Literatur.

"How could it escape his calm understanding that this so named idyllic condition presupposes the most depressing poverty of mind and, on this very account, must be utterly incapable of restoring the dignity and energy of the human race?"

"It is, however, natural enough for any one dissatisfied with his present position, to divert himself by pictures of a state of things completely dissimilar, without taking much account of the real worth of the means he would adopt for the desired end. Gessner had fallen into the strange error of wishing to uproot the tree whose fruits he yet wished to enjoy. While he denounced intellectual life, he forgot that it was to that very intellectual culture he owed the taste for simplicity and truth which is the privilege of higher natures only; while, therefore, he delighted in placing the world in this idyllic condition, he involuntarily imagined himself in possession of those advantages which culture alone can bestow and which would have been impossible in a state of nature."

The "First mariner" appeared shortly after the Idyls and was followed, some years later, by the well known "Death of Abel" which called forth an absolute burst of applause, not only in Germany but in France where the Idyls had already reached a second or third edition. Huber's translation rendered the name of the author almost as familiar to French readers as to those of his native land, and Rousseau, in particular, was loud in his praises. "Gessner", he wrote to Huber, "is a man after my own heart; in a fit of the most tormenting anguish I received the volume

of the Idyls; after I had read the letter, I carelessly opened the book with the full persuasion that I should soon have to close it again; but I did not close it till I had read every word, and put it down only to take it up again." The then all powerful Duchess de Choiseul made Gessner a proposition to come to Paris and reside there; but he excused himself alleging the holy bond which linked him to his native land. To what an extent the admiration he had excited in France had arisen, may be judged from the fact that, on the publication of the second volume of Idyls, Diderot proposed to publish two tales he had just written in the same volume! "It rejoiced him (were his words) to appear in one volume with Gessner." Gessner accepted this proposal with no little pride.

He had now reached his 30<sup>th</sup> year without any positive profession, dividing his time between poetical labours, lectures and painting of which he continued passionately fond. But his union with a charming girl, more richly endowed by nature than by fortune, made him feel the necessity of devoting himself to one pursuit so as to provide for the wants of a family. This, he knew, could with difficulty be accomplished by literary labours. They had brought him plenty of fame, but very little money; so he wisely reverted to his career of artist which procured him an independant, if not a wealthy existence. Blessed in domestic ties, honoured, strange as it may seem to us, with the admiration of Europe, Gessner lived tranquil and happy till the year 1780, when an apoplectic fit put an end to his existence. His popularity remained unabated for many years

after his decease; but as the interest attached to his productions was purely artificial, the result of momentary caprice and fashion, neither inherent in human nature nor resulting from any striking poetic beauties in the works themselves, it gradually diminished till, at length, it very nearly disappeared. In France, where his Idyls were the subject of such loud eulogiums, his name is almost forgotten; but in his native land it is still popular among the young and unsophisticated.

A still more striking instance of undue celebrity followed by complete oblivion, is found in Peter Uz, styled the Anacreon of Germany as Ramler was her Horace, but with far less title to the appellation. Even as late as the middle of the present century, he maintained his rank among poets of the first order. "The blessing of contemporaries and posterity", says his biographer who wrote in 1818, (1) "light on this source of wisdom! Eternal gratitude and eternal remembrance hallow his venerable name!" — Alas! for human celebrity! — Uz's productions are so completely devoid of any poetic merit that we shall offer no citation, and his life was as uninteresting as his works. He has no claim to be remembered beyond thousands of good inoffensive men who have written bad poetry. He died in 1796.

---

(1) Sammlung der vorzüglichsten deutschen Clässiker. Vol. 26th.  
Karlsruhe 1848.

END OF VOLUME FIRST.

---

---

28



